

THE STRAITS TIMES

Life Big year for Mark Lee D3



Life

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New school year kicks off with new app for parents

A mobile application to improve communication between parents and schools at the primary, secondary and junior college levels was launched yesterday by Education Minister Ong Ye Kung.

Besides getting updates on school programmes and activities, parents can use the app, named Parents Gateway, to provide consent for their children to participate in school activities.

The new school year sees a shift in education, with Primary 1 and 2 pupils no longer having to sit any examinations. Secondary 1 students will skip the mid-year exams and, over the next two years, Primary 3, Primary 5 and Secondary 3 students will also no longer need to sit the mid-year exams.

The changes, announced last year by the Ministry of Education, are to reduce excessive focus on grades and to help students discover the joy of learning.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A7



Primary 1 children at Huamin Primary School having their first recess as parents kept an eye on them yesterday. The new school year sees a shift away from an exam-heavy curriculum, with Primary 1 and 2 pupils no longer having to sit any exams, among other changes the MOE announced last year. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

S'pore's GDP slows to 2.2% in Q4: Flash data

Singapore's economy ended on a low note last year, and economists say the downward trend is likely to drag on during 2019.

The slowest quarter of growth in 2018 was recorded for the October to December period, at 2.2 per cent year on year, flash estimates by the Ministry of Trade and Industry yesterday showed.

This comes amid global trade tensions and slowing manufacturing demand.

Overall, the Singapore economy grew by 3.3 per cent for the whole of last year, down from 2017's 3.6 per cent.

Economists noted that the drag in the manufacturing sector here has partly spilt over to services producing industries, which saw a 1.9 per cent year-on-year growth, compared with 2.6 per cent growth in the previous quarter.

SEE BUSINESS C1

Private home prices see end to winning streak

0.1% dip in Q4, led mainly by landed property segment, is first quarterly fall since Q2 in 2017

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

Singapore's private home prices saw their first quarterly decline since the second quarter of 2017, as the July 6 cooling measures ended a price recovery that lasted only five quarters, the shortest on record, analysts say.

Private home prices dipped by 0.1 per cent quarter on quarter in the final three months of last year, slid-

ing back from a 0.5 per cent increase in the third quarter, according to flash estimates from the Urban Redevelopment Authority released yesterday.

For the whole of last year, prices still rose 7.9 per cent, compared with a 1.1 per cent increase in 2017. If not for the measures, property prices could have increased by more than 10 per cent last year, said Cushman & Wakefield's senior director and head of research Christine Li.

Meanwhile, prices of resale flats fell 0.9 per cent last year compared with the year before, flash estimates by the Housing Board showed. Prices fell an estimated 0.2 per cent in the fourth quarter.

While some expect the HDB resale market to continue its gradual decline in the year ahead, barring possible changes to usage of the Central Provident Fund for older flats, analysts pointed out that private home prices are already showing signs of stabilising, just five months after the cooling measures.

In fact, prices have already reverted to at least where they stood when the cooling measures were

introduced, said OrangeTee & Tie's head of research and consultancy Christine Sun.

Huttons Asia head of research Lee Sze Teck noted: "Also, this decrease in prices may not be significant and it appears to be driven by the landed segment."

The luxury landed property segment saw prices falling by 1.8 per cent in the fourth quarter.

"Being bigger-ticket items, landed home prices have taken a greater beating as demand softened," said JLL senior director of research and consultancy Ong Teck Hui.

The non-landed segment, meanwhile, managed to eke out an in-

crease of 0.3 per cent after staying unchanged in the previous quarter. That growth was driven by the city fringes or rest of central region segment, and the suburbs or outside central region (OCR) segment, which rose by 1.8 per cent and 0.8 per cent quarter on quarter, respectively.

For the whole of last year, prices rose 6.2 per cent in the prime or core central region.

Prices climbed 7.4 per cent in the city fringes and 9.5 per cent in the suburbs, respectively.

The city fringes also saw the highest number of new launches in the fourth quarter. These included Arena Residences, Kent Ridge Hill Residences, Parc Esta and The Woodleigh Residences.

These four projects managed to record fairly healthy sales, at median prices ranging from \$1,699 to \$2,002 per sq ft, Mr Ong said.

Ms Tricia Song, Colliers International's head of research for Singapore, expects the city fringes to see fewer launches this year compared with last year, with key projects such as a 1,101-unit Silat Avenue site and the redevelopment of Pearl Bank

Apartments and Normanton Park. Prices in the suburbs were held up by large launches that have been put on the market in the fourth quarter and earlier. These include Whistler Grand, Affinity at Serangoon, Riverfront Residences, Le Quest and The Jovell.

"In 2019, we expect several large launches, such as the 2,225-unit Treasure at Tampines and 1,410-unit The Florence Residences in the OCR. Given the sheer size of the projects and potential competition, we expect them to be priced competitively. We expect the OCR to see some pricing pressure through 2019," said Ms Song.

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A5

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10 must-reads for today

1 Raffles blends in
The Sir Stamford Raffles statue next to the Singapore River at Boat Quay looks like it is disappearing, thanks to some dark grey outdoor acrylic paint. The optical illusion was created with the help of local artist Teng Kai Wei in commemoration of the Singapore Bicentennial this year. **HOME B1**

2 Private home prices fall
Private home prices dipped by 0.1 per cent quarter-on-quarter in the final three months of 2018. This is a reversal of the 0.5 per cent increase in the third quarter and the first quarterly decline since the second quarter of 2017. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

3 First woman on council
Singtel group chief executive Chua Sock Koong became the first woman to be appointed to the Council of Presidential Advisers yesterday. The other two people appointed were Mr Eddie Teo and Mr Chua Thian Poh. **TOP OF THE NEWS A6**

4 Debate over child abuse
The savage beating of a little girl in Shenzhen by her parents in a viral video has shocked the country's netizens. Child welfare experts say that, on paper, legislation in China outlaws such abuse. But workers often do not get training on how to spot signs of abuse. **WORLD A8**



The statue of Sir Stamford Raffles is painted to blend into the buildings behind it. A sign near the statue indicates the optimum angle to take a photo of the statue such that it blends in with the background. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

5 Travel warning on Mindanao
Britain has issued a travel advisory warning its citizens from travelling to the insurgency-racked Philippine island of Mindanao. A blast in Cotabato city on New Year's Eve killed two people and wounded dozens. Officials have linked the bombing to two small militant groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. **WORLD A16**

6 Dreaded PSLE milestone
As a working mum, senior tech correspondent Irene Tham frets about her child entering Primary 4 – the year preparation for the high-stakes PSLE starts. **OPINION A22**

7 ICA officer jailed for 3 years
Immigration and Checkpoints Authority officer Chin Peng Sum was jailed for three years for abusing his position. He had used his work-issued phone to alert three Chinese nationals working illegally here to impending raids. **HOME B6**

8 Horizon relaunched for sale
Horizon Towers, a 211-unit, 99-year leasehold condominium in the Leonie Hill area, has relaunched for sale by tender for a second time at the same reserve price of \$1.1 billion. **BUSINESS C1**

9 STTA appoints head coach
The Singapore Table Tennis Association has appointed former national player Gao Ning as its men's head coach. He will train players in the national team and intermediate squad. The association also promoted Goi Ruixuan, Wong Xinru, Josh Chua and Koen Pang to the national team. **SPORT C7**

10 Spotlight on local talent
Singaporean Huang Muen and his team at local production company Illuminate – founded by him in 2012 – have been handpicked by American-Taiwanese singer Wang Leehom to be part of the core concert crew following him on tour. **LIFE D5**

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WEB SPECIAL

Pricing gaffes

Cathay Pacific made a mistake recently, selling tickets at a fraction of their prices. Here are other pricing glitches that have taken place, though not always to the consumers' advantage. <http://str.sg/priceglitch>



WEB SPECIAL

Orchard goes smoke-free

Orchard Road became a no-smoking zone on Tuesday. You can light up in public areas only at designated places. Here is more about the precinct-wide smoking ban. <http://str.sg/no-smoke>

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Irvins offers refunds after dead lizard found in snack

Customer's relatives found gecko in Salted Egg Fish Skin snack after finishing half a bag

Ng Huiwen

Singapore-based food company Irvins Salted Egg is offering refunds for certain batches of its popular snack after a customer in Bangkok found a dead lizard coated with salted egg in a packet.

Irvins Salted Egg, which has at least 13 outlets in Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines, manufactures all its products in Singapore. Locals and tourists often stand in line to snap up its products, which come with a "dangerously addictive" label on its packaging.

Ms Jane Holloway, 38, who lives in Bangkok, said in a Facebook post last Saturday that her mother and brother had finished half a bag of Irvins Salted Egg Fish Skin before discovering the dead gecko.

Describing it as "so disgusting", she wrote: "How can this happen? This gecko was probably deep fried with the salmon skin by the looks of it. Eeeewwww!"

Speaking to The Straits Times yesterday, Ms Holloway said that she bought the product in Bangkok in early November from Villa Market, an international supermarket at K

Village in Khlong Toei district. Her Thai mother, who also lives in Bangkok, opened the packet last week to enjoy the snack with her Siem Reap-based brother, who was visiting them over the Christmas and New Year holidays. Her father is Australian.

Her brother initially thought that the dead lizard was a baby salmon fish head.

Ms Holloway, who works at the Thailand Institute of Justice, said that she had bought the snack several times for her family and her colleagues.

"It is also really expensive here at 700 baht (\$S29.60) a packet," she said, adding that it was one of her favourite snacks.

In Singapore, a small packet of the Salted Egg Fish Skin snack weighing 105g retails for \$8, while a big packet at 230g costs \$16. Ms Holloway had bought a big packet.

Yesterday, Irvins Salted Egg founder Irvin Gunawan said in a statement that the company was "shocked and devastated" to hear about the incident.

"We really want to sincerely apologise to the customer and everyone who is affected by this incident di-



Irvins Salted Egg issued an apology yesterday. The Singapore-based food company is offering refunds for certain batches of its popular snack. PHOTO: IRVINS SALTED EGG/FACEBOOK



Ms Jane Holloway bought the snack in Bangkok in early November. Her brother initially thought the dead lizard was a baby salmon fish head. PHOTO: JANE HOLLOWAY/FACEBOOK

"We promise to make the necessary changes in our production to ensure this will never happen again," he said.

He said the firm will also investigate the matter further as it does not have a full explanation on how the dead lizard ended up in the snack.

An AVA spokesman said it has received feedback on the incident and is investigating.

In an e-mail response to Ms Holloway's brother seen by The Straits Times, Mr Gunawan offered the family a refund and to pay the cost of any medical bills arising from the incident.

He also said that the company, which started at a cafe in Jalan Leban, had moved to a new production facility last month, where "our hygiene and checking procedures are much, much stricter".

SHOCKING FIND

How can this happen?
This gecko was probably deep fried with the salmon skin by the looks of it. Eeeewwww!

MS JANE HOLLOWAY, who lives in Bangkok, in a Facebook post last Saturday.

The company's new production facility is in JTC Food Hub in Senoko Drive. It did not say where its previous facility was located, when asked. Two addresses are listed on the packet containing the lizard: One in Admiralty Street, and the other in Senoko South Road.

Ms Holloway said that while none of her family members has fallen ill after eating the snack, they are "definitely traumatised".

"Mum says she feels like throwing up when she thinks about it," she said.

In yesterday's statement, Mr Gunawan said customers with salted egg snacks expiring on Oct 16 this year should e-mail feedback@irvinsaltedegg.com to return the products and receive a refund.

Customers who are uncomfortable eating any Irvins Salted Egg snack should do the same as well. All recalled products would be disposed of, he added.

Some netizens called for the authorities to take action in response to the incident. Facebook user Mun Yong Wong wrote: "I hope the health authorities deal with this very strictly as these items are also exported overseas and brought by tourists to their home countries. This will tarnish the name of Singapore if found abroad."

However, others commended the company's response to the situation. Facebook user Wren Wren wrote: "Rather than avoiding this issue or trying to cover up any matters relating to this unfortunate incident, Irvins chose to face it, learn from it and move on to provide a better experience to all their customers. Kudos to them for being honest and genuine in business."

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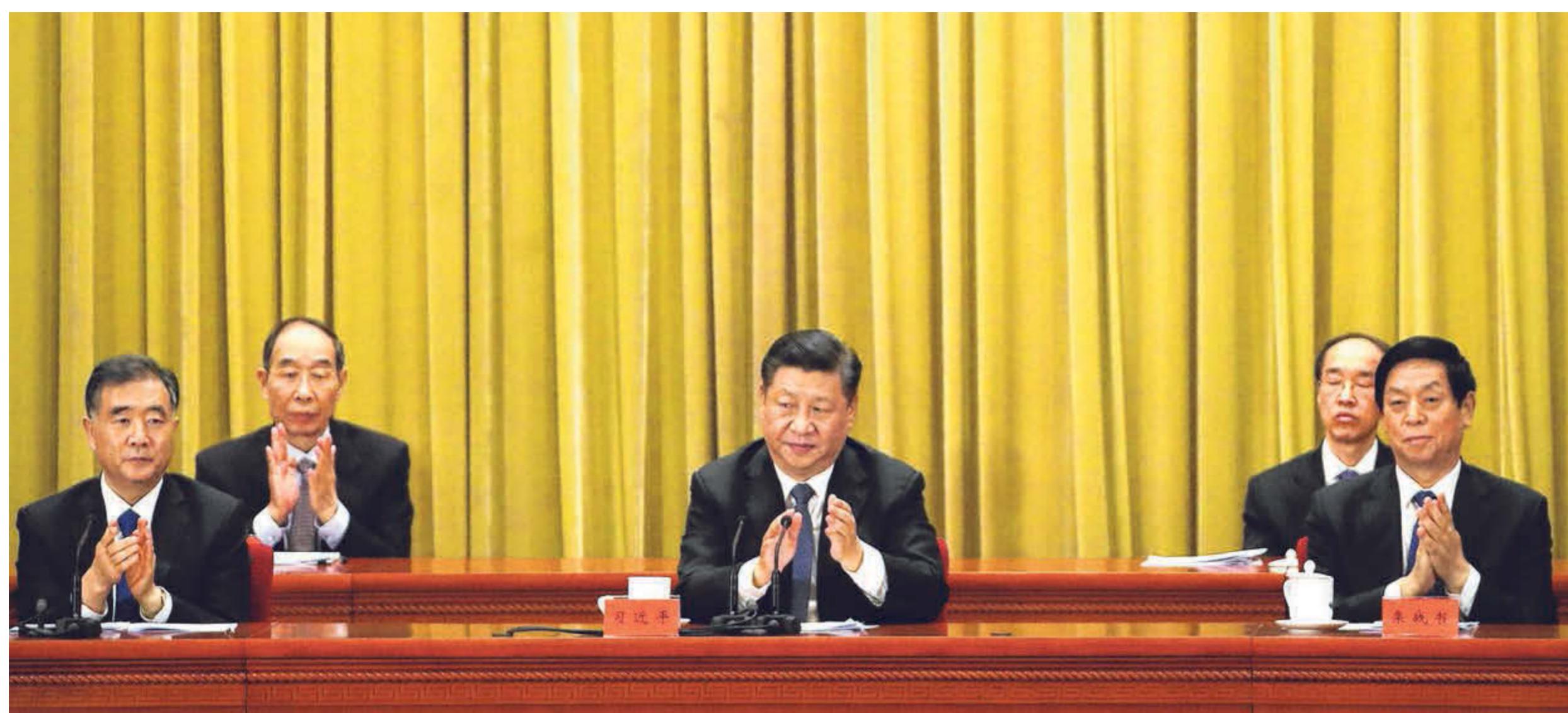
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Chinese President Xi Jinping (centre) at an event yesterday to mark 40 years since China proposed ending military confrontation with Taiwan and seeking reunification through dialogue, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

China-Taiwan reunification is inevitable: Xi

Chinese leader does not rule out military option, even as he promises more growth opportunities for the island

Tan Dawn Wei
China Bureau Chief
In Beijing

Taiwan's reunification with China is inevitable and will bring greater stability to the Asia-Pacific region and the world, President Xi Jinping said yesterday as he promised more opportunities for the estranged territory in China's growth and a one-country-two-systems model that guarantees its rights.

But the Chinese leader also sounded a stern warning: Agitate for independence and face China's military wrath.

In his first major speech for the new year, President Xi gave a definitive outline of the future of China-Taiwan relations, assuring the Taiwanese their rights and interests would be protected, while appealing to their emotions as ethnic Chi-

nese who should rightfully be bonded to the motherland.

Reunification has always been an unshakable historical task" since the Kuomintang-led government withdrew to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the Chinese civil war, he said.

"The motherland must be unified, and will be unified. This is the conclusion drawn over 70 years of development in cross-strait relations and an inevitable requirement of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era," he said in an address to government officials and military officers at the Great Hall of the People.

The event was to mark 40 years since China proposed ending military confrontation with Taiwan and seeking reunification through dialogue, after establishing diplomatic relations with the United States in 1979.

President Xi has taken steps to

unify the two lands since becoming China's leader in 2012.

He met then Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou in Singapore in 2015 in the first meeting between leaders of both sides since the civil war ended.

But after Ms Tsai Ing-wen led the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party to power in Taiwan in 2016, President Xi has been exerting pressure on the territory by cutting contact with its government and goading countries to break diplomatic ties with the island.

Yesterday, in a message directed seemingly at the US and pro-independence advocates, he made clear China will not tolerate foreign meddling and separatists, and will turn to military power, if necessary.

"We do not promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures, targeting external interference and a very small number of 'Taiwan independence' separatists and their separatist activities, not against Taiwan compatriots," he said.

HISTORICAL TASK

The motherland must be unified, and will be unified. This is the conclusion drawn over 70 years of development in cross-strait relations and an inevitable requirement of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era.

CHINESE PRESIDENT XI JINPING

President Xi acknowledged the difference in the political systems of China and Taiwan, but dismissed it being an obstacle, saying the one-country-two-systems model will ensure the "social systems and lifestyles of Taiwan compatriots will be fully respected".

"Chinese people do not fight Chinese. We are willing to strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with the utmost sincerity and the best efforts because achieving reunification through peaceful means is most beneficial to the compatriots on both sides of the strait and the entire nation."

Taiwan's President Tsai yesterday rebuffed President Xi's offer, saying most Taiwanese oppose the one-country-two-systems model.

Dr Hoo Tiang Boon, a cross-strait relations expert at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, said putting the military option on the table was necessary for President Xi, who faces internal pressure over Beijing's handling of the trade dispute with the US.

"Taiwan is one of the issues that his internal critics could come at him with, and the last thing he probably wants is to be criticised for being soft on Taiwan. (Taking a hard line) is almost an obligatory part of his speech," said Dr Hoo.

Apart from keeping up the pressure on the Tsai administration, President Xi's speech was also a warning to the US, which China worries will leverage the Taiwan issue to force more concessions from the Chinese.

"The message, in terms of broader China-US relations, is that all things can be discussed but Taiwan is certainly off-limits."

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China will not yield on core national interests: Report

SHANGHAI • China will not yield on issues it deems to be its core national interests, a commentary in the ruling Communist Party's official newspaper said yesterday, a day after Chinese President Xi Jinping called for cooperation with the United States.

"In matters related to core national interests, China has not given in, is not giving in, and will never give in," the People's Daily commentary said.

Mr Xi and US President Donald Trump sent congratulatory messages to each other on Tuesday, marking the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

China and the US face a key deadline in March for talks to end their damaging trade war. Mr Trump has said talks towards a deal are progressing well.

However, "regardless of the development of Sino-US relations, China's strategic choice to deepen reform and opening is unwavering, and we are committed to doing our own thing", the commentary said.

In the messages sent on Tuesday, Mr Xi underlined the importance of working with the US "to advance China-US relations featuring coordination, cooperation and stability", reported state news agency Xinhua.

According to Xinhua, Mr Trump praised the last four decades of diplomacy between China and the US, hailing his "solid friendship" with the Chinese leader.

Washington and Beijing imposed tit-for-tat tariffs on more than US\$300 billion (\$409 billion) worth of goods in total two-way trade last year, locking the two countries in a conflict that has begun to eat into profits and contributed to stock market plunges.

Since the two leaders agreed on a truce on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit meeting in Buenos Aires, however, there have been small signs of progress – and an absence of new threats from Mr Trump. REUTERS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

News analysis

Cross-strait ties to remain tense with both sides taking tough stance



Goh Sui Noy

East Asia Editor

While Chinese President Xi Jinping did not set a deadline, his speech yesterday conveyed a sense of urgency over the issue of reunification with Taiwan. He has also taken a harder line on the island that Beijing regards as a breakaway province, analysts have said.

"The longstanding political differences between the two sides of the (Taiwan) Strait are the roots that affect the stability of cross-strait relations. They cannot be passed down from generation to generation," Mr Xi said in his speech commemorating the 40th anniversary of China's Message to Compatriots in Taiwan on Jan 1, 1979.

The original message, a policy document of the National People's Congress, China's Parliament, had

proposed ending military confrontation and welcomed exchanges between the two sides.

But Mr Xi, in his speech, spoke about the 70 years of political confrontation between the two sides – after the Kuomintang government lost the civil war against the Chinese Communist Party and fled to Taiwan in 1949 – signalling an urgency to resolve the Taiwan issue, said Beijing-based security analyst Wang Xiangsui of Beihang University.

In another sign that he wanted the cross-strait negotiations to gather steam, Mr Xi also said the two sides should establish an institutional arrangement for the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.

Mr Xi's tone was also more hardline than expected, said Professor Jin Canrong of Renmin University. The Chinese President said: "China must and will inevitably be united, which is a necessary requirement for the historical rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era."

While noting that Chinese do not attack Chinese and that China would make the greatest effort towards peaceful reunification, Mr

Xi also said that "we will not renounce the use of force and reserve the option to use all necessary measures" to deal with outside interference and separatists and their activities.

A reason for such a hardline stance, said Prof Jin, is that China has become more self-confident as its strength has grown.

But it is also a response to the current situation on the ground.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, after her Democratic Progressive Party's serious setback in last November's local elections, has leaned more towards the pro-independence camp in her party and towards the United States, noted Prof Jin.

This comes as the US has shown itself to be more willing to play the Taiwan card, he added.

Prof Wang of Beihang University said the spectre of outside interference has contributed to the sense of urgency that Beijing feels over resolving the Taiwan issue.

As an example of what Beijing sees as American interference, he pointed to US President Donald Trump signing the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act on the last day of last year. The Act calls for, among other things, US arms sales on a regular basis to Taiwan



Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (centre) taking part in the national flag-raising ceremony in Taipei on New Year's Day. After her party's serious setback in local elections last November, she has leaned more towards the pro-independence camp in her party and towards the US, noted Professor Jin Canrong of Renmin University. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

and recommends top US administrative and military officials to visit Taipei in accordance with the Taiwan Travel Act.

What is clear is that Mr Xi does not want to deal with the current Taiwan administration. There was no mention of it at all in his speech.

"He has no trust in or illusion about the Taiwan authority," said Prof Wang, referring to the Taiwanese government.

Instead, Mr Xi said the mainland was willing, under the "one China" principle, to sit down with representatives of different political parties and organisations and personages from Taiwan to discuss peaceful reunification.

In response to Mr Xi's speech, Ms Tsai said all cross-strait negotiations must be on a government-to-government basis and rejected the "one country, two

systems" framework for reunification that Mr Xi proposed.

In a speech earlier this week, she had said China must use peaceful means to resolve differences between the two sides and respect Taiwan's democratic values.

With both sides taking a hardline stance, cross-strait ties are set to continue to be tense.

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HDB resale flat prices fell 0.9% last year

Price decline more gradual than in 2017; 2018's fourth quarter saw 0.2% price drop

Rachel Au-Yong
Housing Correspondent

Housing Board resale flat prices edged down 0.2 per cent in the fourth quarter of last year, resulting in a full-year price drop of 0.9 per cent, according to HDB's flash estimates released yesterday.

This means the price decline last year was more gradual than the 1.5 per cent slide in 2017.

The final figures, with more detailed data on public housing, will be given on Jan 25.

HDB also said it will launch its first Build-To-Order (BTO) exercise for the year next month, offering about 3,100 flats in Jurong West, Kallang/Whampoa and Sengkang.

There will also be a Re-Offer of Bal-ance Flats exercise.

As announced last month, HDB said this year's total BTO supply will be about 15,000 flats - below last year's 17,000 or so units.

OrangeTee & Tie head of research Christine Sun traced the dip in the fourth quarter's HDB resale prices to concerns over the depreciating value of older flats and last July's property cooling measures, which included a tightening of loan limits.

Another factor she highlighted was the increased supply of HDB flats entering the resale market after reaching the minimum occupation period (MOP). "The decline in overall prices has been moderate, as there were more non-standard flats reaching MOP and being sold at relatively attractive prices in recent months," she said.



3,100

Number of flats in Jurong West, Kallang/Whampoa and Sengkang to be launched in the Housing Board's first Build-To-Order exercise of 2019 in February.

Some of them include executive apartments, terrace houses, units built under the Design, Build and Sell Scheme and flats at Pinnacle@Duxton, she added.

Looking ahead, Huttons Asia research head Lee Sze Teck said HDB resale prices, which have been declining since 2013, are likely to continue sliding this year.

That is because the ramped-up

supply of BTO flats sold in 2015 and 2016, as well as several executive condominiums and private residential projects, will be ready this year.

"HDB upgraders will have to sell their current flats within six months. This year, transaction volume looks set to be slightly higher than last year, but prices are likely to stay in the range of minus 1 per cent and 0 per cent," he said.

Ms Sun said that with more HDB resale flats reaching the MOP this year, resale prices could slip further. But this could be countered by fewer BTO flats being launched, and the Government possibly allowing buyers to use a bigger proportion of their Central Provident Fund savings to buy older flats.

She expects resale prices to hover between zero and minus 2 per cent for the whole of this year.

Others were more optimistic.

PropNex Realty chief executive

Ismail Gafoor foresees resale prices going up 1 per cent to 2 per cent this year, owing to more collective sale sellers entering the HDB resale market to buy replacement homes.

ERA Realty key executive Eugene Lim projects HDB resale prices to rise, at most, by 1 per cent. Factors he cited include the lease decay issue - in which the value of an HDB flat is expected to hit zero as it nears the end of its 99-year lease - being largely addressed by the Voluntary Early Redevelopment Scheme.

Other factors include the authorities looking at making the use of CPF funds more flexible for buying flats with shorter leases.

"Resale flats are still an attractive option for buyers, with generous grants from the Government. They are also the only way for buyers to buy a flat in their location of choice."

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HDB has said that the total Build-To-Order supply this year will be about 15,000 flats - fewer than the 17,000 or so units last year.
ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Private home prices: Analysts see some positive signs

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

Following two straight quarters of mild price movements after the July 6 cooling measures, some analysts are ready to call an end to the recovery in private housing prices - which they say is the shortest on record, lasting just five quarters.

It certainly appears that way, with a bumper supply of new homes expected to hit the market this year amid higher interest rates. At least 40 new launches will yield more than 14,000 units this year, analysts say.

Further, the measures and rising macro-economic uncertainty exacted a toll on prices of luxury landed property and non-landed property in the prime or core central region (CCR) in the fourth quarter.

Cushman & Wakefield senior director and head of research Christine Li said: "With two quarters of mild price changes, the housing price boom seen in the first half of 2018 is now a thing of the past. The fall in CCR and landed prices points to a stronger cooling effect on properties that have higher price quantum... The cooling measures have also made it less attractive for foreigners to invest in Singapore property in the near term."

Yet, some analysts point to signs of stabilisation in private home prices, just five months after the cooling measures.

In fact, prices have already climbed back at least to where they stood when the cooling measures were introduced, said OrangeTee & Tie's head of research and consultancy Christine Sun.

The support could come from the non-landed segment. Barring an economic downturn, prices of new homes in upcoming launches

are unlikely to drop sharply as developers had bought land at high costs during the recent collective sales cycle.

And should Singapore's full-year 2018 GDP growth forecast of around 3.3 per cent hold, they see private home prices stabilising, possibly rising at a slower pace of between 1 per cent and 3 per cent for 2019.

ERA Realty key executive officer Eugene Lim noted: "We are expecting prices to hold steady this year, with (40-plus) new launches lined up. Developers, while mindful to price realistically in order to move sales, are not under significant pressure to cut prices."

Some took heart that non-landed prices managed to eke out a 0.3 per cent gain in the fourth quarter after staying flat in the third quarter, and the transaction volume was healthy despite the measures.

"Although the market has cooled, local demand for private property remains strong, and... together with en bloc beneficiaries who need replacement homes, this should translate to sustained demand in 2019," Ms Li said.

The supply of completed units is expected to be below the historical average for the next few years, said Ms Tricia Song, head of research for Singapore, Colliers International. This should support prices.

Barring external shocks - such as an escalation of the US-China trade war, a messy Brexit and heightened geopolitical tensions - the Singapore economy is expected to chug along steadily in 2019, and this should still drive demand. That said, one key area to watch this year is the pace of interest rate hikes which could affect buying interest, she added.

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OMINOUS SIGNS

From the latest we have seen from the air, the mountain is sloping and smoke is rising from beneath the sea water. And on the body of the mountain... there are cracks that continue to emit smoke.

“

DR DWIKORITA KARNAWATI, head of the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency, referring to Anak Krakatau.

Anak Krakatau spewing hot ash during an eruption, as seen from an Indonesian naval patrol boat in the Sunda Strait in Lampung, Indonesia, on Tuesday, in this photograph taken by Antara Foto. PHOTO: REUTERS

Indonesia on tsunami alert after new cracks found on volcano

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

New cracks have emerged on the Anak Krakatau volcano, prompting the Indonesian authorities to urge those in the vicinity to be on the alert in case a collapse sets off another tsunami.

Dr Dwikorita Karnawati, head of the Meteorology, Climatology and

Geophysics Agency, told reporters yesterday: "Of course the hope is that it will not be like what happened (on Dec 22), but we ask the public to be vigilant when they are in the 500m zone around the coast."

A section of the volcano's slope collapsed after it erupted that day, sliding into the ocean and displacing massive amounts of water that sent waves up to 5m high crashing into densely populated areas on Sumatra and Java islands.

Dr Dwikorita said the two new cracks appeared after the volcano's height dropped from 338m to 110m following its eruptions. "From the latest we have seen from the air, the mountain is sloping and smoke is rising from beneath the sea water. And on the body of the mountain... there are cracks that continue to emit smoke," she said.

"The cracks are certainly deep", unlike normal gaps, and they are located close to each other, she

added. "If there is another eruption, the cracks might connect and weaken the slope, causing part of the mountain to collapse again," said Dr Dwikorita.

The part that could collapse has a volume of about 60 million cubic m - smaller than the 90 million cubic m of slope that slid into the Sunda Strait on Dec 22, she said.

Though new cracks have been spotted, volcanic activity has been decreasing, added Dr Dwikorita.

President Joko Widodo spent the first working day of the year in Lampung on Sumatra Island. It was one of the areas worst hit by the tsunami that left more than 430 people dead and over 14,000 injured.

He has ordered the building of new housing in the regency of South Lampung, about 400m from flattened homes. About 110 people died in the regency. The high toll was because many homes were on the beach.

"Housing will be relocated be-

cause this location is vulnerable to tsunamis," Mr Joko told reporters.

And the government hopes to include disaster management in elementary and high schools.

"Disaster education must start this January, especially for regions where there is a high possibility of big disasters," he said.

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SEE WORLD A10

Singtel CEO first woman on Council of Presidential Advisers

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

Singtel group chief executive Chua Sock Koong has become the first woman appointed to the Council of Presidential Advisers (CPA).

She was among the three people appointed to the council yesterday at a ceremony held at the Istana. The other two were Mr Eddie Teo, who was appointed CPA chairman, and council member Chua Thian Poh, who was previously an alternate member.

Ms Chua, an alternate member, was nominated and appointed by

President Halimah Yacob. The trio took their oaths before Judge of Appeal Judith Prakash.

The council comprises eight members and two alternate members. It advises the President on the use of her discretionary and custodial powers in safeguarding past reserves of the Government, Fifth Schedule Statutory Boards and government companies. It also advises her on the appointments of various key personnel in the public service.

Ms Chua joined Singtel in 1989, and rose to be its group chief executive in April 2007. She sits on the boards of several companies, including the Defence Science and Tech-



nology Agency and telecommunications firm Bharti Airtel. She has a bachelor's degree in accountancy from the then University of Singapore. She is also a Fellow Member of

the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants and a Chartered Financial Analyst charter holder.

Ms Chua said she was extremely honoured to be appointed to the

council, adding: "I hope to contribute to the council's diversity of views and look forward to advising President Halimah as she exercises her custodial powers."

President Halimah Yacob shaking hands with Ms Chua Sock Koong, who took her oath before Judge of Appeal Judith Prakash at the Istana yesterday. Ms Chua is an alternate member of the Council of Presidential Advisers.

PHOTO: HALIMAH YACOB/FACEBOOK

Mr Teo, whose move was announced last month, succeeds Mr J.Y. Pillay. A former President's Scholar, he has spent nearly 50 years in public service, 10 of them as Public Service Commission chairman.

He was previously director of the Internal Security Department and permanent secretary in the Ministry of Defence and Prime Minister's Office, among other postings.

Mr Chua is chairman and chief executive of Ho Bee Group, and was appointed an alternate member in April 2017. He serves on the boards of several other companies and community organisations.

He is currently chairman of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre. He is also honorary president of the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as immediate past president of the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan.

He has received several awards, including the Distinguished Service Order in 2014.

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Travellers leaving Japan to pay departure tax from Jan 7

\$12.50 to be collected from each person leaving by plane or ship

TOKYO • Visitors to Japan will have to pay a 1,000 yen (\$S12.50) levy when leaving the country from Monday, Japanese media reported.

Japan will start collecting the 1,000 yen departure tax for each person leaving the country by aircraft or ship regardless of nationality, said officials, according to the Japan Times.

People leaving Japan within 24 hours of their transit entry and children under two years old will be exempted from the departure tax, the

levy will be collected each time an individual leaves the country, and comes on top of airfare, ship fare and travel fees.

The Japanese government plans to utilise the revenue from the tax for measures to accommodate more foreign visitors to the country, develop tourism bases and improve immigration procedures, said officials, according to the Japan Times.

Specifically, the revenue will be used to set up facial recognition gates at airports for speedier immigration procedures, while also promoting the use of multilingual information boards and helping to introduce more cashless payment terminals for public transportation.

The Japanese government plans to utilise the revenue from the tax for measures to accommodate more foreign visitors to the country, develop tourism bases and improve immigration procedures, officials said, according to the Japan Times.

report said. Those with tickets purchased and issued before Jan 7 will also be exempted, it added.

The revenue from the tax is estimated to hit 6 billion yen in the 2018 fiscal year to March this year, and 50 billion yen in the 2019 fiscal year, the Japan Times said.

According to the legislation, the government also plans to get public transportation operators to expand free wireless Internet services and roll out electronic payment systems. Within Japan, Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto charge a lodging tax of 100 to 300 yen per person per night to finance local tourism promotion and other measures.

The number of visitors to Japan has surged in recent years, topping 30 million for the first time ever last year.

According to the Japan National Tourism Organisation, travellers from Singapore made around 400,000 trips to Japan in 2017, accounting for 1.4 per cent of the total number of in-bound trips made by foreigners.

The government has set a goal of increasing the annual number of foreign visitors to 40 million by 2020, when Tokyo hosts the Olympics and Paralympics.

With the departure tax, the government expects to secure stable financial resources for measures to promote tourism, the officials said.

2 women enter Kerala temple, breaking tradition

Nirmala Ganapathy
India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

Two women created history by entering the Hindu temple of Sabarimala yesterday, offering prayers to the bachelor god and smashing the longstanding practice of barring women from entering the temple.

But their feat triggered protests in different parts of the southern state of Kerala, where the temple is located, by people who maintained that the act went against the temple's tradition.

Women between the ages of 10 and 50, or of menstruating age, were banned out of tradition from stepping into the temple, which is devoted to Lord Ayyappa, a deity considered a celibate.

The Supreme Court lifted the ban in September last year, ruling that it amounted to gender discrimination.

But despite the decision, Hindu groups and devotees, including women, held violent protests that earlier prevented the women from entering the hilltop temple, which draws millions of visitors every year.

At midnight on Tuesday, Ms Bindu Ammini, 42, and Ms Kanaka Durga, 44, both dressed in all-black attire with their heads covered, started their trek to the temple.

They reached the temple at around 3.45am yesterday, according to reports.

A video of the women making their way into the temple complex and walking towards the sanctum sanctorum while being protected by the police was widely shared on WhatsApp and shown on television. The two women had to abort an earlier attempt due to the protests in the area.

"We arrived in Pamba at midnight. We went to the police station, but went ahead with our trek without police protection. We did not face any protests from any quarters," Ms Durga told television channel CNN-IBN.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan confirmed that the women



Protesters carrying a portrait of the deity Lord Ayyappa during a rally yesterday called by various Hindu organisations after the two women entered the Sabarimala temple in Kochi, Kerala. Women between the ages of 10 and 50 were banned out of tradition from entering the temple, but the Supreme Court lifted the ban in September last year, ruling that it amounted to gender discrimination. PHOTO: REUTERS

had entered the temple under police protection. They are understood to have entered through a separate VIP entry.

The state has witnessed violent protests by devotees and right-wing groups opposing the lifting of the ban. Over the past three months, at least two dozen women, including journalists, were turned away by protesters who blocked roads and checked vehicles to ensure women did not enter the temple premises.

On Tuesday, women formed a 620km human chain for gender equality over the Sabarimala issue in a protest organised by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which

is part of Kerala's ruling coalition.

The Bharatiya Janata Party called it a "black day", with different groups warning of trouble in the coming days.

Police yesterday used water cannon and tear gas to disperse protesters who had gathered, including in front of the state secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala's capital.

After the two women's visit, priests closed the temple's sanctum sanctorum to perform a purification ceremony.

"The temple has been washed and purification rituals were done. We will organise a huge protest against this and continue the legal battle,"

PROTESTS TO CONTINUE

The temple has been washed and purification rituals were done. We will organise a huge protest against this and continue the legal battle.

“

MR RAHUL EASWAR, president of the Ayyappa Dharmasena, on the Supreme Court's decision to review its lifting of the ban on women entering the temple.

said Mr Rahul Easwar, president of the pro-tradition group Ayyappa Dharmasena, referring to a decision by the Supreme Court in November to review its ruling.

The annual Sabarimala pilgrimage is one of the world's largest, with millions of male devotees trekking barefoot up a steep hill to visit the shrine. They also undertake a rigorous 41-day fast, which includes observing a vegetarian diet and practising celibacy.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi indicated in an interview with ANI News that traditions are important.

one should get justice. There are some temples which have their own traditions, where men can't go. And men don't go," he said.

Activists were critical of the purification ceremony.

"The entry of women is in keeping with the Supreme Court order. But the purification ceremony is nothing but a form of untouchability, which is prohibited by the state," said Ms Kavita Krishnan, a member of the Communist Party of India politburo. "Whatever it is, two women entered and have given prayers."

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Education Minister Ong Ye Kung chatting with Primary 1 pupils on their first day of school at Huamin Primary yesterday. At the school, he launched mobile app Parents Gateway, which aims to improve communication between parents and schools at the primary, secondary and junior college levels. ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN

New mobile app to better connect parents, schools

It can be used for administrative purposes and to send updates on students' activities

Jolene Ang

MORE CONVENIENT

We used to receive consent forms and letters from the school, but sometimes we misplace them or the kids might throw them away. Now, we can refer to programme details whenever we want or check if the children have home-based learning.

“

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT VANITHA VARATHARAJOO, who has a daughter in Primary 5 and a son in Primary 6.

“So, I think we need not be limited other than by our imagination.”

Administrative assistant Vanitha Varatharajoo, 34, who has a daughter in Primary 5 and a son in Primary 6 at Huamin, said: “We used to receive consent forms and letters from the school, but sometimes we misplace them or the kids might throw them away.”

“Now, we can refer to programme details whenever we want or check if the children have home-based learning.”

Mr Ong said the app would benefit teachers as well.

“I really hope (through) using this gateway, we can cut down on the administrative load on the teachers and this hopefully will, over time, free up more time for them so they can better focus on what they are good at, which is teaching and learning,” he said.

Parents can log in using their SingPass accounts, and receive one-time passwords via SMS two-factor authentication or the OneKey token.

The app is available on iOS and Android, and was developed by the Government Technology Agency and the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Currently, there are 66 primary and secondary schools taking part in the initiative. MOE will progressively extend the app to all schools, though no target date has been set.

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Above: Primary 1 pupil Kaelyn Tan, six, with her mother Felicia See, 40, during recess break at Huamin Primary School yesterday.



Left: Pupils queuing to get food during recess on the first day of the new school year.

Adjusting to shift away from exam-heavy curriculum

The first day of school can be nerve-racking for some children and their parents, but this year they can look forward to a shift away from an exam-heavy curriculum.

Primary 1 and 2 pupils will not need to sit any examinations from this year, while Secondary 1 students will skip the mid-year exams.

Over the next two years, Primary 3, Primary 5 and Secondary 3 students will also no longer need to sit the mid-year exams.

These were among the changes announced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) last year in a bid to get schools, students and parents to move away from focusing too much on grades, and to help students discover the joy of learning.

At Huamin Primary yesterday,

parents told The Straits Times that like the schools and the children, they too will need to adjust.

Madam Alissayazana Zainal has two daughters at the school in Yishun, in Primary 1 and Primary 3.

“I am more inclined to think it is good. Exams stress out parents and kids,” the senior bank officer said.

Madam Alissayazana, 33, described how her elder daughter struggled with nerves while preparing for the Primary 2 year-end exams last year.

“In the days leading up to the exams, she had cold feet. She told us she didn’t want to sit the exams,” she added.

But her daughter had no trouble with class tests.

“The word ‘exam’ is just a label,

but it scares the children,” said Madam Alissayazana.

Housewife Angela Chin, 48, who has a son in Primary 4 at the same school, said that although not having exams would make it easier for parents as well, they would still need to figure out how they can ensure their children keep up with school work.

With the changes, a pupil’s progress will be assessed through things such as worksheets, class work and homework.

Mrs Mumtaj Menon-Ibrahim, Huamin Primary’s head of English, said the school introduced such formative assessments about four years ago. Through these assessments, pupils can get immediate feedback from their teachers after

oral performances or show-and-tell activities.

Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, who was at the school to launch a mobile application, told parents that the removal of exams will free up about three weeks of curriculum time every two years.

Mr Ong said previously that there was a need to rebalance the overemphasis on assessment and shift the focus to teaching and learning. “There is nothing wrong with having examinations and class tests, but we need to use them in suitable quantities.”

“Our focus is to return the curriculum time to the schools to free up learning and teaching.”

The new year will also see schools being given guidelines where only

one class test for each subject per term is counted towards the year-end score.

Report books will also no longer show a student’s position in relation to class and cohort, and failing marks will not be highlighted.

Other academic indicators such as students’ L1R5 (English plus five relevant subjects) or L1R4 scores will not be reflected for the lower secondary levels.

With the removal of grades at Primary 1 and 2, MOE will also adjust the academic criteria for Edusave awards. The awards will now recognise pupils’ attitudes to learning, such as diligence, curiosity, collaboration and enthusiasm.

Jolene Ang

EXAM NERVES

In the days leading up to the exams, she had cold feet. She told us she didn’t want to sit the exams.

“

MADAM ALISSAYAZANA ZAINAL, whose elder daughter struggled with nerves while preparing for the Primary 2 year-end exams last year.

WORLD



DZULKEFLY AHMAD
MALAYSIA'S HEALTH
MINISTER CONDUCTS
SPOT CHECKS UNDER
NEW SMOKING BAN **A14**

Child abuse video flags gaps in China's welfare system

Teachers, social workers 'not trained' to spot warning signs

Danson Cheong
China Correspondent
In Beijing

It was both the savagery of the beatings and the impulsive reaction of the little girl as she took the blows that shocked Chinese netizens.

The video clips in the three-minute compilation, filmed by a home security camera in the city of Shenzhen last September and October, went viral before Christmas.

It showed the parents of the eight-year-old girl slapping her and slamming her to the ground while she ate or did her homework.

In one instance, the father beat her repeatedly with a broom.

In all the video clips, the girl, who is in elementary school, did not dodge the blows or cry out, and would return calmly to what she was doing after the beatings.

The video has since been deleted from Chinese social media by cen-

sors, but it has ignited debate on how children in China remain vulnerable to abuse and highlighted the welfare system's deficiencies in protecting minors.

The parents – identified as a 34-year-old man and his 33-year-old wife – have since been arrested and now face criminal penalties, said Shenzhen's public security bureau last week.

Child welfare experts say that, on paper, legislation in China – namely the Law on the Protection of Minors and the Anti-Domestic Violence Law – outlaws such abuse against children and provides comprehensive legal protection.

For instance, the latter requires teachers, medical workers and workers from community or social organisations to report cases of domestic violence to the police if they discover signs of it in the course of their work.

This is regarded as a key way to spot cases of child abuse quickly, because children are often unable to go to the police on their own.

But the workers often do not get training on how to spot signs of abuse, so such cases often go unnoticed and unreported, said Professor Tong Xiaojun from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"There are tell-tale signs that identify physical and sexual abuse but teachers need to be trained to spot them," said Prof Tong, adding that police are alerted many times not by teachers, but when videos are leaked to the media.

Pointing to the recent incident in Shenzhen, she said that the abuse had probably been going on for

43%

Percentage of children between 10 and 17 found to have been "violently" abused by one or both parents in a study by the All-China Women's Federation in 2013.

years, and that the child has been injured to the violence.

The fact that she does not cry out or have any reaction to the beatings shows the amount of psychological damage that has been done to her," said Prof Tong.

Mr Lu Xiaoquan, a lawyer from the Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Consulting Services Centre which provides legal aid, said the law also lacks the mechanism to hold people accountable if they notice signs of abuse but fail to report it.

"Without such measures, even good laws cannot be implemented effectively," said Mr Lu.

A study by the All-China Women's Federation in 2013 found that more than 43 per cent of children between 10 and 17 years old were "violently" abused by one or both parents.

The Asia Foundation, a non-profit developmental organisation,

noted in a 2017 report that while corporal punishment is banned, parents continue to see it as acceptable behaviour.

This is rooted in traditional ways of bringing up children, said Mr Lu, pointing to the saying that if you spare the rod, you spoil the child. But this is gradually changing.

While stressing proper family education, the Chinese government has published guidelines on how parents can raise children in a "scientific manner", said Professor Xiong Bingqi, vice-president of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, a think-tank in Beijing.

He said: "Public consciousness on the issue is in the process of changing.

"That's why videos like this will surface. They spark outrage and anger because people now understand it is wrong."

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An online video clip showing the eight-year-old girl being beaten repeatedly by her mother in Shenzhen last September. The parents have since been arrested and are facing criminal penalties.
PHOTO: SCREEN GRAB FROM YOUTUBE/ THE PAPER



Members of the public queuing to enter the Imperial Palace for the traditional New Year appearance by the royal family yesterday. About 154,800 people flocked to the palace for a chance to see the 85-year-old monarch. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Japan Emperor gives last New Year speech to record crowd

TOKYO • Japan's Emperor Akihito delivered his final New Year's address yesterday before his abdication later this year, telling a record turnout of well-wishers that he was praying for peace.

The Imperial Palace provisionally said about 154,800 people had flocked to the royal residence for a final chance to see the 85-year-old monarch deliver his traditional annual greeting.

It was the largest number of visitors to the palace for his New Year speech since he ascended the throne in 1989.

The Emperor, dressed in a dark suit, appeared seven times at the balcony – up from five originally scheduled – as he "strongly" wanted more people to attend after seeing the vast number of well-

wishers still gathered outside the palace in the afternoon, a palace spokesman said.

He will become the first Japanese monarch to abdicate in around two centuries when he steps down from the throne on April 30, ending his three-decade reign.

"Happy New Year. I'm sincerely glad to celebrate the new year together with you under the clear sky," he told the crowd, many waving Japanese flags and shouting "banzai", meaning "long live".

"I hope this year will be a good year for as many people as possible," said the soft-spoken Emperor, flanked by Empress Michiko and other family members.

"I pray for the peace and happiness of the people of our country and the world," he added.

Some in the morning crowd yelled, "Thank you very much", as the Emperor waved, while others sang the national anthem.

"I came here with my mother to imprint his last appearance as emperor in our memories," said Ms Yume Nishimura, a university student, as she waited in a long queue to enter the palace.

Mr Kazuo Iwasaki, a 68-year-old pensioner, said: "I hope he will be able to spend his post-retirement years in a healthy and relaxing manner with Empress Michiko."

Emperor Akihito shocked the country in 2016 when he signalled his desire to take a back seat, citing his age and health problems.

His eldest son, Crown Prince Naruhito, is set to take the Chrysanthemum Throne a day after his



Emperor Akihito (far left), accompanied by (from left) Crown Prince Naruhito, Empress Michiko and Crown Princess Masako, delivering his last New Year's address at the Imperial Palace yesterday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

father's abdication, continuing the rule of the world's oldest imperial family.

The status of the emperor is sensitive in Japan given its 20th-century

history of war waged in the name of Emperor Akihito's father, Hirohito, who died in 1989.

Emperor Akihito has keenly embraced the more modern role as a

symbol of the state – imposed after World War II ended. Previous emperors, including his father, had been treated as semi-divine.

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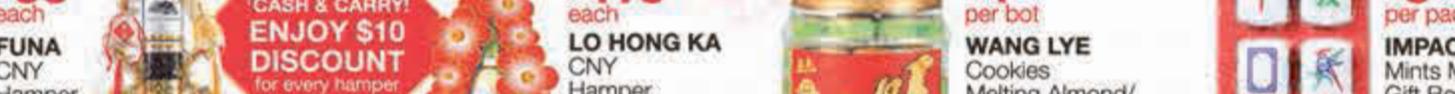
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Indonesia's '10 New Balis' tourism push rocked by disasters

Killer tsunami, quakes and other disasters could keep tourists from scenic spots on list

TANJUNG LESUNG (Indonesia) • Picture-postcard Tanjung Lesung was a cornerstone of Indonesia's bid to supercharge its tourism industry.

It boasts palm-fringed beaches, a rainforest sanctuary for endangered Javan rhinos and a towering volcano in the middle of turquoise waters.

But the beachside town now lies in ruins, pummeled by a deadly tsunami that has raised fresh questions about disaster preparedness and the future of a multibillion-dollar push to replicate Bali's success across the South-east Asian archipelago.

The community was hosting a pop concert when the waves crashed ashore last month at night and without warning.

Several members of the Indonesian band Seventeen and more than

100 others at the Tanjung Lesung Beach Hotel were killed – about a quarter of those who died in the volcano-triggered tsunami.

A clutch of other area hotels was also devastated, with beachside cottages flattened and debris – chairs, tables and the band's audio equipment – scattered everywhere.

Tourism Minister Arief Yahya, who ordered that the town be rebuilt in six months, brushed aside concerns sparked by the tsunami, which was triggered by a sudden eruption of the Anak Krakatau volcano.

"Disasters can happen anywhere in Indonesia," he told Agence France-Presse during a recent visit there. "We need to have (tsunami) early warning systems, especially in tourist destinations. We're going to make that happen."

But some are less convinced, especially since disaster monitors became aware of the killer waves only after they had already smashed into the coastline along western Java and southern Sumatra.

"It's going to be even more difficult to promote (the area), especially now that buildings are destroyed and the volcano is more active," said Mr Tedjo Iskandar, a Jakarta-based travel analyst.

About 42 per cent of Indonesia's 14 million foreign tourists headed to the popular resort island of Bali last year, giving a US\$17 billion (S\$23.1 billion) boost to South-east Asia's biggest economy.

The government picked Tanjung Lesung and nine other locations as part of its "10 New Balis" strategy, a plan unveiled in 2016 with an eye on courting Chinese, Singaporean and other investors as it pushes to hit 20 million tourists annually.

The list includes ancient Buddhist and Hindu temples, tropical islands near Jakarta, the Mount



The sport and leisure centre at the Tanjung Lesung Beach resort in ruins on Dec 26 last year after a deadly tsunami pummeled the west coast of Indonesia's Java island on Dec 22. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Bromo volcano in eastern Java, and a national park that is home to Komodo dragons, the world's biggest lizard.

But the killer tsunami has dealt a blow to plans to pump some US\$4 billion into Tanjung Lesung.

And it is not the only spot in the government's tourism plan to suffer a disaster – natural or man-made – that could scare away tourists.

Lombok, next to Bali, was rocked

by earthquakes in the summer that killed more than 500 and sparked a mass exodus of foreigners from the tropical paradise.

That was weeks after Lake Toba on Sumatra island – also on the "New Bali" list – was the scene of a ferry accident that left almost 200 people missing or dead.

Last May, Indonesia's second-biggest city, Surabaya, was hit by suicide bombings carried out by Islamist militants, while Bali was

rocked as Mount Agung blew its top at the end of 2017.

Jakarta's tourism push may still have a chance, but only if it gets serious about safety, said Mr I Ketut Ardana, head of the Association of Indonesian Tour and Travel Agencies' Bali office.

"(The government) needs to better inform locals and tourists so they are prepared when a disaster strikes," he said.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Secondary landslides hamper rescue efforts in West Java

JAKARTA • Secondary landslides were impeding search and rescue efforts at a landslide that caused fatalities this week in Sukabumi, West Java, where 20 people are still missing after 66 were saved, including three with serious injuries.

National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said the search and rescue team had to deal with four secondary landslides in the area on Tuesday that were triggered by torrential rain.

"The fragile soil is quite dangerous for the team, especially when it rains," he said in a statement yesterday. Due to the risk, he said, the team had to stop their activity on Tuesday and would resume yesterday.

He added that the disaster area had been marked as a zone prone to landslides on a Centre for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (CVGHM) map, which showed land movement risks in Sukabumi. Thirty-three sub-districts in Sukabumi are categorised as prone to landslides, meaning that land movement could occur during strong rainfall.

Dr Nugroho noted that by Tuesday night, at least 15 people had been found dead, 20 people were missing and 30 houses had been buried by the Monday landslide.

Meanwhile, Mr Kasbani, head of the CVGHM, said he had deployed the land movement response team to the site to conduct disaster evaluations, assess the risk of secondary landslides and provide technical advice for the rescue effort.

Indonesia is a disaster-prone archipelago that last year suffered its deadliest year in over a decade with a series of earthquakes and tsunamis in different regions which killed more than 3,000 people.

THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK, REUTERS



Rescue workers carrying a body bag in Sukabumi, which was hit by a landslide on Monday. At least 15 people had been found dead and 20 people were still missing by Tuesday night, but search and rescue efforts were impeded by four secondary landslides. PHOTO: REUTERS

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Cathay Pacific to honour premium tickets sold at economy prices

HONG KONG • Cathay Pacific Airways made a mistake selling first- and business-class tickets at a steep discount. Now, the lucky few who made the bookings will travel in style after all.

The Hong Kong-based airline said on its Twitter and Facebook pages yesterday that it would still welcome passengers who bought the business-class tickets from Vietnam to Canada and the United States at economy prices earlier this week.

The online ticketing foul-up meant return fares of as low as US\$675 (S\$920) from Da Nang in Vietnam to New York for seats at the front end of the plane – a small fraction of the original prices.

"We do not want to go back on our promise to our customers," Cathay said on its Twitter account.

around as competition intensifies from Chinese and budget airlines.

The gaffe comes on the heels of a sophisticated hack on Cathay's computer systems last year that exposed private information of 9.4 million passengers in the world's biggest airline data breach.

Mr Gary Leff, a travel and loyalty-programme blogger on View From The Wing, wrote on Monday that the Cathay business-class round trip from Da Nang to New York started at US\$675 for travel in August.

Yesterday, the same journey cost around US\$16,000 for July and September, according to the airline's website. Prices were not available for August.

Travel from Hanoi to Vancouver and back in a mix of business and first class could cost less than US\$1,000, according to a post on website One Mile At A Time.

Other airlines have made similar pricing errors previously.

Singapore Airlines in 2014 and Hong Kong Airlines last year honoured business-class tickets mistakenly sold at economy prices.

Both carriers did not disclose how many people bought the cheaper tickets. BLOOMBERG



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MORE COVERAGE
The nine types of establishments currently under the smoking ban include open-air eateries, shop lots, restaurants and also food trucks. But day by day, we will identify more public places to add to the list such as launderettes, as sometimes there are people smoking there and this can be a hazard to children.

HEALTH MINISTER DZULKEFLY AHMAD, on gazetting more establishments to make Malaysia a 'clean-air nation'.

An employee of an eatery in Sandakan, Sarawak, putting up a no-smoking sign on Tuesday, the day the ban kicked in. PHOTO: BERNAMA

Some defy smoking ban in eateries even as KL plans to add more areas

Offenders face fines and jail when 6-month grace period ends

PETALING JAYA • A check on 58 eateries across Malaysia to see the effect of a smoking ban that kicked in on Jan 1 found that there was general compliance at eateries in Penang and Ipoh, but many of the restaurants surveyed in the Klang

Valley and Melaka defied the ban and some patrons were seen puffing away.

The places surveyed by a team sent out by The Star included mamak restaurants, coffee shops, food courts and one fast food outlet, the Malaysian newspaper said in a report yesterday.

In October, the health ministry announced that smoking in all restaurants, coffee shops and

hawker centres – even open-air eateries – nationwide would be banned from this year.

Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad, who personally conducted spot checks on some restaurants in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, said the government planned to gazette more establishments as no-smoking areas to make Malaysia a "clean-air nation".

"The nine types of establish-

ments currently under the smoking ban include open-air eateries, shop lots, restaurants and also food trucks," said Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly.

"But day by day we will identify more public places to add to the list such as launderettes, as sometimes there are people smoking there and this can be a hazard to children."

While there was no timeline to gazette more places as smoke-free zones, he said the list would be expanded gradually.

Dr Dzulkefly said the ministry was also ready to face a smokers' rights group, which filed for judicial review to challenge the smoking ban on Monday, in court.

"The government stands firm in protecting vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children from cigarette smoke in public places," he said. "We are more than willing to see them in court. We have a very firm ground."

Out of the 58 eateries The Star observed, 48 had put up at least one sign warning customers not to smoke.

In the Klang Valley, workers at

two eateries were seen telling off customers who tried to light up.

In Penang, all 20 restaurants observed had no-smoking signs put up but there were smokers puffing away in five. In Ipoh, one patron was seen lighting up in the back alley.

All eight establishments surveyed in Melaka had no-smoking signs put up, but some customers were smoking freely.

Those caught smoking in prohibited areas can be fined by up to RM10,000 (S\$3,300) or face two years' jail, while eateries found to have allowed customers to light up will be slapped with a maximum fine of RM2,500.

No fines will be issued in the first six months after the ban takes effect, Dr Dzulkefly had said earlier, as enforcement officers would focus instead on raising public awareness of the ban. But repeat offenders would be taken note of, he said.

Smokers are, however, permitted to light up 3m away from the establishments.

Besides tobacco products, vapes and shishas with nicotine are also included in the ban.

Rail link project may resume on smaller scale: Mahathir

PETALING JAYA • The East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), an ambitious project suspended last year, could resume on a smaller scale if China agrees to the move, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was reported by Malaysians media as saying.

He said both countries are still in talks on the matter and have not arrived at a good solution.

"What we are trying to do is to ensure that we will not spend much money, while China will not suffer a loss," Dr Mahathir told the Chinese-

language Sin Chew Daily in an interview on Monday.

The interview was picked up by the Malaysiakini news site yesterday.

The 688km rail link, if built, would connect Port Klang in Selangor to towns in Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan states, before ending in Tumpat near the Thai border in Kelantan.

Malaysia is in a dilemma between terminating the project or continuing with it, with either option entailing huge financial costs, said Dr Mahathir. Therefore, Malaysia will seek to amend the project or other alternatives, he added.

"We are negotiating – formally or informally – with them (the Chinese). To them, this is a profitable contract, so they are reluctant to make changes," he said.

Before the May 9 general election last year, the now-ruling Pakatan Harapan alliance led by Dr Mahathir had vowed to terminate the ECRL project, as it said the contract and loan terms were unfavourable to Malaysia.

"But this is not easy, as we were bound by the contract and could not terminate the project easily, as we have no money to pay China... We have paid a lot of money to China after the postponement," he said.

The RM81 billion (S\$26.6 billion) ECRL project, suspended last July, was approved by the Cabinet under then Premier Najib Razak in October 2016. The construction was to be handled by China Communications

Construction Company (CCCC), while the financing was to be provided by the Export-Import Bank of China (Exim Bank of China).

Malaysia would be able to secure part of the loan from the Exim Bank of China on the condition that CCCC builds the railway.

Dr Mahathir said the ECRL is a waste of money, as the government would not get any returns from the rail project and there is no way for Putrajaya to tax the concessionaire.

FINDING A COMPROMISE

What we are trying to do is to ensure that we will not spend much money, while China will not suffer a loss.

“

MALAYSIA PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMAD, on negotiating with the Chinese to find a good solution.

Anwar: Give Mahathir space to lead govt over agreed time

PETALING JAYA • Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad must be given the space to lead the government for the duration their coalition agreed on, his designated successor, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, said.

The Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) president tweeted this yesterday after what he said was an hour-long meeting with the Prime Minister, The Star reported.

"Tun M must be given the space to lead the government for the duration that we agreed upon," Mr Anwar wrote, pledging full support for their Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition.

Before the 14th general election on May 9 last year, the PH component parties, which include PKR and Dr Mahathir's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), agreed



Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (left) and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad met for an hour yesterday. Mr Anwar tweeted that they agreed on "the same strategies regarding Singapore". PHOTO: ANWAR IBRAHIM/TWITTER

that if the coalition won, Dr Mahathir would be the PM for two years before handing over the reins to Mr Anwar.

Dr Mahathir has said he would keep his word as he is "only a temporary PM", despite calls from within PPBM that he keep the post until

the next general election.

In a second tweet, Mr Anwar said he and Dr Mahathir agreed on "the same strategies regarding Singapore", and on the Malaysian economy, especially with regard to "poverty and inequality". It was not clear what the strate-

gies referred to are.

Separately, Dr Mahathir wrote on his blog, Chedet, on Tuesday that public complaints against those who abuse the rule of law – be it rulers or ministers – are legitimate and do not breach any law, and should not be construed as sedition.

WorldBriefs

Melaka's year-end tourist arrivals down

MELAKA • Tourist arrivals in Melaka, especially from Singapore, fell by 28 per cent during the 2018 year-end peak period, and a tourism-based non-government organisation claims this is mainly due to the recent spate of rallies and racially-tinged speeches by opposition leaders and Malay rights groups in the Klang Valley.

President of Melaka Tourism Business Club Chew Chert Fong said tourist arrivals peaked from Dec 22 to 28, a far cry from previous years when holidaying started in November. THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Plaintiffs in WWII case apply to seize assets

SEOUL • South Korean plaintiffs in a World War II forced labour court case against

Japan's Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp have applied to seize some of its Korean assets, a South Korean newspaper reported yesterday.

The application for the asset seizure, if approved by the court in Seoul, could further strain already frosty bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea over the issue. REUTERS

Rescued women must pay for passage home

LONDON • Britain is charging young women rescued from forced marriages abroad for the cost of their repatriation, The Times newspaper revealed yesterday.

Victims are told they have to fund their flight back to Britain and basic food and shelter costs, it reported. Those who are aged over 18 and cannot pay have to sign emergency loan agreements with the Foreign Office. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

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Police officers at the site of an explosion outside a shopping mall in Cotabato City, Mindanao, on Monday. Two people were killed and at least 32 others wounded in the attack. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Britain issues travel advisory for Mindanao after terror blast

Explosion outside shopping mall being linked to two pro-ISIS militant groups

Raul Dancel
Philippines Correspondent
In Manila

Britain has warned its citizens against travelling to the insurgency-racked southern Philippine island of Mindanao after a bomb went off in a mainly Muslim city there on Monday, killing two and wounding dozens.

Philippine security officials are linking the blast outside a shopping mall in Cotabato city in central Mindanao to two small militant groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

"Terrorist groups continue to plan attacks and have the capacity and the intent to carry out attacks at any time and anywhere in the country, including in places visited by foreigners, like airports, shopping malls, public transport, including the metro system, and places of worship," Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office said in an up-

date to its travel advisory on its website.

It advised British citizens to avoid travelling to western and central Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, and limit "all but essential travel" to the rest of Mindanao, an island the size of South Korea.

The travel advisory also referred to a warning last month by the United States that security at Manila's main airport was not "consistent" with International Civil Aviation Organisation standards.

"That's fair warning," Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin responded in a tweet yesterday.

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said in a text message the travel advisory "is normal and ordinary".

"It is an automatic and default warning of governments to their nationals like we also do when these things happen in other countries," he added.

But Interior Secretary Eduardo Ano, a former military chief, disagreed with it.

ROUTINE ACTION

It is an automatic and default warning of governments to their nationals like we also do when these things happen in other countries.

DEFENCE SECRETARY DELFIN LORENZANA, on Britain's travel advisory, calling it normal and ordinary.

There is no need for foreign governments to issue a travel advisory in Mindanao areas because incidents of explosions and presence of terror groups are isolated cases.

INTERIOR SECRETARY EDUARDO ANO, a former military chief.

"There is no need for foreign governments to issue a travel advisory in Mindanao areas because incidents of explosions and presence of terror groups are isolated cases," he told GMA News Online.

Major-General Cirilito Sobejana, chief of the 6th Infantry Division, told reporters yesterday that security forces remained on alert for attacks by militants on cities in central Mindanao where nine-tenths of the population is Muslim.

"It is always the intention of terrorists to sow fear in the public's mind. So they continue to smuggle improvised explosive devices (IEDs)..."

"Every now and then, there's a threat of an IED explosion. But we've generally managed to intercept them... It's just this one time when they managed to slip by us," he said.

He said investigators were looking into the involvement of two ISIS-inspired groups: one calls itself Daulah Islamiyah, and the Toraife faction of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters.

Security officials earlier cited threats from these groups as one reason martial rule should remain across Mindanao.

Government forces launched an offensive against Daulah Islamiyah last month, and at least seven militants died in the fighting.

"This is a part of the retaliation. But the problem is they're victimising innocent civilians," Maj-Gen Sobejana told reporters.

He said a plebiscite set for this month to ratify a long-awaited law to allow minority Muslims in Mindanao to start moving towards self-rule by 2022 could have also precipitated the attack in Cotabato.

"There's election fever because of the plebiscite. There's an intense rivalry among politicians supporting and against the BOL (Bangsamoro Organic Law)," he said.

The BOL is the culmination of a lengthy and rocky process towards a peace accord between the government and the separatists.

In the interim, militants linked to ISIS managed to expand their influence, evident clearly from their devastating occupation of Marawi City in 2017.

In the capital Manila, meanwhile, some 7,000 policemen are being deployed to secure a mammoth Catholic procession next week.

rdancel@sph.com.sg

Australia says it has right to strip ISIS recruiter's citizenship

SYDNEY • Australia's government is confident it has grounds to strip an alleged ISIS recruiter of citizenship, a minister said yesterday, as questions arose over whether doing so could be illegal and leave the man stateless.

The case highlights the problems many governments face as they consider what action to take against people who have travelled abroad, often to the Middle East, to join militant groups.

Under Australian law, a person can only be stripped of his citizenship if he is a dual citizen, thereby preventing people from being made stateless.

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said Melbourne-born Neil Prakash, who is imprisoned in Turkey, was a dual citizen as he also has Fijian citizenship.

Prakash ceased to be an Australian "by virtue of his actions in fighting for Islamic State from May 2016", and he had been notified of the decision in December, Mr Dutton said.

"The advice to the government based on all the intricate detail and fact of this particular matter is that Mr Prakash is, by operation of law, a citizen of Fiji," he told reporters in Brisbane.

Prakash has been in Turkey on trial for charges relating to being a member of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria militant group since being caught there in October 2016.

Australia believes Prakash is a dual national because his father is Fijian. But Fiji's director of immigration, Mr Nemani Vuniwaqa, told Reuters that Prakash is not Fijian.

Prakash can challenge the Australian government's decision, Mr Dutton said, and he could be entitled to retain his citizenship if he does not hold dual-citizenship status.

The government has said Prakash had appeared in ISIS videos and magazines and had actively recruited Australian men, women and children, and encouraged acts of terrorism. Prakash is also wanted in Australia over terrorism-related activities, including a suspected plot to behead a police officer, though an Australian push for his extradition was rejected by Turkey in July. REUTERS

The case highlights the problems many governments face as they consider what action to take against people who have travelled abroad, often to the Middle East, to join militant groups.

German driver targeted foreigners in car attack

BERLIN • A 50-year-old German man accused of driving a car into groups of foreigners on New Year's Eve has been formally remanded in custody for attempted murder, police said yesterday.

Eight people, including two children, were wounded in an assault that police described as a "targeted attack" motivated by the driver's hostility to foreigners".

The German man is accused of accelerating his car at groups of revellers in Bottrop and Essen, two cities in the west of Germany. He was arrested the same night.

The car hit several people in Bottrop, injuring a four-year-old Afghan boy and his mother, 29, as well as a 10-year-old Syrian girl, said police in a statement.

A Syrian woman, 46, who was also severely hurt in the incident, was declared out of danger after undergoing surgery.

The region's interior minister, Mr Herbert Reul, said the accused "had the clear intention to kill foreigners".

The man was not formerly known

to police. According to the Spiegel Online news website, he had been treated for schizophrenia in the past. The unemployed man reportedly told police that "the high number of foreigners is a problem for Germany that he wants to solve", said Spiegel.

In a separate attack in Britain, a 25-year-old man suspected of stabbing three people with a kitchen knife at Manchester Victoria train station on New Year's Eve was being held and assessed for mental health issue, police said.

Greater Manchester Police were, however, continuing to investigate the attack because of suspected links to terrorism, they said in a statement.

Police raided the man's home in the city's Cheetham Hill area. His name has not yet been released.

A witness, a BBC producer who was at the busy station full of New Year's Eve revellers, said a man stabbed several people at the station, shouting "Allah" and linking his actions to "bomberings in other countries".



Police cordoned off the area in Bottrop where several people were injured after a man drove into a group of revellers on New Year's Eve. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

The station is very close to Manchester Arena, where a suicide bomb attack in May 2017 killed 22 people as they left a concert by pop star Ariana Grande.

Two of those wounded, a woman and a man in their 50s, were in a

serious but not life-threatening condition, police said. The third, a male police officer in his 30s who sustained a stab wound to his shoulder, was released from hospital earlier.

"The Counter Terrorism investi-

gation remains ongoing," police said. "There is nothing to suggest the involvement of other people in this attack, but confirming this remains a main priority for the investigation."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

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The Singapore summit has improved relations between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but Mr Kim's demands in his New Year speech were an indicator of how far away they still are from achieving denuclearisation. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Trump back to square one on North Korea

Stalemate continues after Kim reiterates call for sanctions to be lifted in his New Year speech

WASHINGTON • Nearly two years into his presidency and more than six months after his historic meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, President Donald Trump finds himself essentially back where he was at the beginning in achieving the ambitious goal of getting Mr Kim to relinquish his nuclear arsenal.

That was the essential message of Mr Kim's annual New Year's televised speech, where he reiterated that international sanctions must be lifted before North Korea will give up a single weapon, dismantle a single missile site or stop producing nuclear material.

The list of recent North Korean demands was a clear indicator of how the summit in Singapore in

June altered the optics of the relationship more than the reality.

"It's fair to say that not much has changed, although we now have more clarity regarding North Korea's bottom line," Mr Evans Revere, a veteran US diplomat and former president of the Korea Society, wrote in an e-mail.

"Pyongyang refused to accept the United States' definition of 'denuclearisation' in Singapore," he wrote.

To the US, that means the North gives up its entire nuclear arsenal; in the North's view, it includes a reciprocal pullback of any US ability to threaten it with nuclear weapons.

"The two competing visions of denuclearisation have not changed since then," wrote Mr Revere.

Mr Trump and Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, who is supposed to turn Mr Trump's enthusiasms into diplomatic achievements, dispute such conclusions.

They note that the tone of one of the world's fiercest armed stand-

MORE CLARITY

It's fair to say that not much has changed, although we now have more clarity regarding North Korea's bottom line. Pyongyang refused to accept the United States' definition of 'denuclearisation' in Singapore.

“

MREVANS REVERE, a veteran US diplomat and former president of the Korea Society, writing in an e-mail.

offs has improved. It has, and both leaders say they want to meet again.

In a tweet on Tuesday night, Mr Trump cited Mr Kim's offer not to produce or proliferate weapons, without mentioning the many caveats. He went on to say that he looked forward "to meeting with Chairman Kim who realises so well that North Korea possesses great economic potential!"

Mr Kim's message, delivered in the style of a fireside chat from what appeared to be his library, had none of the old-style threats of turning Seoul into a "sea of fire" or striking the United States with a "nuclear sword of justice".

Mr Trump, for his part, has never returned to his 2017 warning that any hostile moves by the North would be "met by a fire and fury like the world has never seen".

By some measures, there has been modest progress.

It has been 13 months since the North tested a nuclear weapon or a long-range missile, a change that Mr Trump and Mr Pompeo cite as the first fruits of what some officials now concede will be a long diplomatic push.

Relations between the two Koreas are warming, though there is considerable evidence that Mr Kim sees his outreach to President Moon Jae-in of South Korea as a way to split the United States from its long-time ally.

But Mr Trump's strategic goal, from the moment he vowed to "solve" the North Korea problem rather than repeat the mistakes of past presidents, has been to end the North Korean nuclear and missile threat, not suspend it in place.

The decision Mr Trump must make now is whether to backtrack on the objective of zero North Korean nuclear weapons, even if that means accepting the North as a nuclear-armed state, as the United States has done with Pakistan, India and Israel.

To hardliners like Mr Trump's National Security Adviser, Mr John Bolton, who excoriated past administrations for making concessions before disarmament, capitulating to Mr Kim on this issue is anathema.

But to those who have viewed Mr Trump's "maximum pressure" as a strategy bound to fail, Mr Kim's offer of a step-by-step approach is the only pathway to success – though maybe a success that constrains, rather than eliminates, the North's nuclear ambitions.

Some advisers around Mr Trump, including some who have left in the past year, believe that the number of weapons means little to the President; he wants to be seen as the man who ended the Korean War.

That is why, one former adviser said recently, Mr Trump kept repeating the suggestion that he might win a Nobel Peace Prize.

NYTIMES

Pundits weigh in on what Kim means by 'new path'

SEOUL • In his New Year address, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un warned he might take a "new path" if Washington maintains sanctions amid his country's push for economic development, but experts say it may be too late to change the trajectory of negotiations. Here are the implications of such a move:

IS THIS A SIGN OF FRUSTRATION?

Pyongyang has demanded that Washington lift sanctions and declare a formal end to the 1950-53 Korean War in response to the dismantlement of its Punggye-ri nuclear testing site and a key missile engine facility. Despite goodwill responses from Washington, such as a halt of some major military exercises with South Korea, US officials have said North Korea's initial steps were not confirmed and could be easily reversed.

"His (Mr Kim's) message was 'we have done what we said we would at Singapore, but the United States has done very little in return,'" said Dr Vipin Narang, a political scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

WHAT DOES 'NEW PATH' MEAN?

The "new path" may refer to focusing on concessions that do not involve broad denuclearisation in favour of action-for-action commitments.

South Korea's Unification Ministry said yesterday it could not speculate on what the alternative path might be, but Mr Kim showed his "clear resolve" to abandon the weapons programme and improve US ties by mentioning "complete denuclearisation" himself for the first time.

Dr Kim Joon-hyung, a professor of international politics at Handong Global University, said one possible scenario was the North's dismantling of the Yongbyon nuclear complex, as offered at an inter-Korean summit in September in Pyongyang, and acknowledging some facilities in return for eased sanctions, such as a partial restart of inter-Korean economic projects. Mr Kim said in the speech that he was willing to reopen the Kaesong factory park and allow access to the North's Mount Kumgang resort "without conditions".

Yet there remains an opportunity to limit Mr Kim's arsenal, Dr Narang said. "The United States should find out what the price for a cap on North Korea's nuclear programme would be, as it would be an important and realistic objective," he said.

DOES NORTH KOREA WANT TO SHIFT ITS FOCUS FROM AMERICA?

The New Year address called for a launch of multilateral talks to officially declare an end to the Korean War, an idea also floated previously by South Korea.

That could mean working with China, South Korea and others in pressing Washington, Dr Kim said. But other experts, including former South Korean nuclear envoy Lee Soo-hyuk, were sceptical that would happen given the deadlocked bilateral talks, the Sino-US trade war and Mr Trump's dislike for multinational mechanisms. REUTERS

US nuclear command's New Year 'joke' bombs

WASHINGTON • The US military command responsible for the nation's nuclear weapons sparked off a furore after it tweeted a New Year's Eve message that it is always ready to "drop something much, much bigger" than Manhattan's iconic Times Square ball.

The post and accompanying video went live as the country readied to ring in the New Year by watching the famous New York City ball descend at midnight.

The US Strategic Command has since deleted and apologised for the tweet.

"We admittedly erred in connecting it to New Year's Eve festivities, and we apologise," said Major Meghan Liemburg-Archer, a US Strategic Command spokesman. "We remain dedicated to the security of America and our allies."

"#TimesSquare tradition rings in the #NewYear by dropping the big ball... if ever needed, we are #ready to drop something much, much bigger," the original post read. "Watch to the end! @AFGlobalStrike @Whitehouse-AFB #Deterrence #Assurance #CombatReady-Force #PeacelsOurProfession"

The embedded video showed footage of a B-2 stealth bomber. As the words "stealth," "ready," and "lethal" flashed across the screen, the aircraft released bombs. They fall to the ground and crash with a fiery explosion. It also tagged the Whiteman Air Force Base and the Air Force Global Strike Command, which is responsible for nuclear and non-nuclear strategic bomber fleets. The post was deleted within hours and replaced with a subsequent apology from the Strategic Command's official account.

The New Year's Eve post drew confusion and criticism on the social media platform. Mr Walter Shaub, former director of the Office of Government Ethics, re-posted the now-deleted tweet and asked: "What kind of maniacs are running this country?"

Many were unnerved by the flippant comment, which came from the very command that controls American nuclear capabilities.

"This is really disturbing coming from US Strategic Command. It isn't amusing. It is terrifying," wrote one user. Another questioned whether the military planned a bomb strike for midnight.

The original post came hours before outgoing Defense Secretary James Mattis ended his two years as Pentagon chief. WASHINGTON POST

Migrating starlings' startling display



A murmuration of migrating starlings flying above a waste facility near the city of Rahat in southern Israel on Sunday. Starlings from Russia and east Europe often winter in the Holy Land. Swooping, pivoting and soaring, they can put on a display that can shame aerobatics teams worldwide. By grouping together, the starlings not only find safety in numbers, but their changing movements and shifting collective shape also confuse their would-be attackers. PHOTO: REUTERS

More deaths in passenger airline crashes last year

But deadly crashes remain rare with one fatal accident for every 3 million flights

WASHINGTON • The fatality rate on passenger jet aircraft worldwide jumped last year after airlines recorded zero accident deaths on passenger jets in the prior year, according to a Dutch consulting firm and an aviation safety group.

Aviation consulting firm To70 and the Aviation Safety Network both reported on Tuesday that there were more than 500 deaths from passenger airline crashes last year, but emphasised that fatal crashes remain rare.

To70 estimated the fatal accident rate for large commercial passenger flights at 0.36 per million

flights, or one fatal accident for every three million flights.

That is up from 2017's 0.06 per million flight rate and above the most recent five-year average of 0.24 per million flights. There were 13 deaths in 2017 in two fatal crashes worldwide, but both were on regional turboprop aircraft.

Over the past two decades, aviation deaths around the world have been falling.

As recently as 2005, there were 1,015 deaths aboard commercial passenger flights worldwide.

Despite the increase, 2018 was still the third-safest year in terms of

>500

Deaths stemming from passenger airline crashes last year.

13

Deaths in 2017 in two fatal crashes worldwide, but both were on regional turboprop aircraft.

the number of fatal accidents, and the ninth safest measured by deaths, the Aviation Safety Network said.

"If the accident rate had remained the same as 10 years ago, there would have been 39 fatal accidents last year," Aviation Safety Network's chief executive Harro Ranter said. "This shows the enormous progress in terms of safety in the past two decades."

On Oct 29 last year, a Lion Air-operated Boeing 737 Max 8 crashed into the Java Sea after take-off from Jakarta, killing 189.

Last May, a Cuban flight of a Boeing 737-201 crashed just outside Havana airport, killing 112 people.

In March, 51 of 71 on board died after a US-Bangla Airlines plane crashed on landing at Nepal's international airport.

In February, a plane operated by Saratov Airlines crashed in Russia soon after taking off from Moscow, killing all 71 people aboard, while in the same month, an Aseman Airlines flight crashed into a mountain in Iran, killing 66 people on board.

In April, the United States suffered its first accident death involving a US airline since 2009, when a fan blade on a Southwest Airlines Boeing 737's jet engine broke apart in flight, shattering a window and nearly sucking a woman out of the plane. REUTERS

Trump fires back after incoming Senator Romney lambasts him

WASHINGTON • United States President Donald Trump cautioned fellow Republican Mitt Romney to be a "team player" after the former presidential candidate and incoming US Senator from Utah sharply criticised the President's actions and questioned his character.

In a Washington Post essay published late on Tuesday, Mr Romney suggested the US leader had "caused dismay around the world" and said his presidency had "made a deep descent in December".

"On balance, his conduct over the past two years... is evidence that the President has not risen to the mantle of the office," said Mr Romney, who takes up his new role in Washington today.

Mr Trump fired back in a tweet early yesterday morning that took aim at Mr Romney's failed bid for the White House in 2012.

"Here we go with Mitt Romney, but so fast! Question will be, is he a Flake? I hope not. Would much prefer that Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things where he can be helpful. I won big, and he didn't. He should be happy for all Republicans. Be a TEAM player & WIN!" Mr Trump wrote on Twitter.

The President appeared to reference outgoing US Senator Jeff Flake, one of the few Republican lawmakers who publicly spoke out against Mr Trump and drew the President's wrath. REUTERS

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Russian media in Germany spreading propaganda: Berlin

Channels air fake news aimed at dividing German public opinion, govt officials admit

Markus Ziemer
Global Affairs Correspondent
In Berlin

Almost no day goes by without news about the suspected meddling of Russia in US politics. Moscow is believed to have massively influenced the outcome of the US presidential election in 2016.

Almost running below the international radar, however, is the extent of Russian propaganda and interference in Europe and, in particular, Germany.

Only recently did Berlin officially acknowledge that certain Russian media operating in Germany had only one goal: spreading Kremlin propaganda. The government was responding to a question in Parliament by the liberal Free Democratic Party, which sought an assessment of the operations of Russian media channels in Germany.

The Ministry of the Interior responded by confirming for the first time that media programmes such as RT Deutsch (formerly Russia Today), news agencies Sputnik and Ruptly, and the Facebook channel In The Now were clearly Russian propaganda tools.

All of them were in one way or the other linked to Rossiya Segodnya, a state-owned media holding company created by Russian President Vladimir Putin by decree in December 2013 and funded to the tune of hundreds of millions of euros.

The media programmes were designed to present alternative versions of current events that ostensibly German media had ignored. Controversial topics such as migration, populism, poverty and of course European relations with Russia and Ukraine – which have already divided public opinion – were singled out for broadcasting.

RT, claiming to uncover "media manipulations", is actually itself spreading fake news. The most prominent example is the case of Lisa, a 13-year-old girl from Berlin who was reported missing by her parents in early 2016.

After she resurfaced, she said that she had been raped by people of "Mediterranean type". This claim at the height of the migration crisis caused an uproar in the German public, fuelling anti-immigration sentiment.

However, Lisa's claim turned out to be a lie. The girl simply had stayed overnight with a friend. Medical examinations were unambiguous: There was no rape.

Russian media, however, eagerly picked up the story, suggesting that German police had put pressure on the girl to retract her claims.

The current wave of populism in Germany has been helping the Russian programmes as they have become particularly attractive among certain fringe groups.

Politicians of the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) are frequently interviewed by RT and the likes. AfD and Pegida, an anti-Islam

movement that sprung up in late 2014 in eastern Germany, are regularly calling the established media "Lügenpresse", media of lies. These politicians believe that, to be well informed, they have to rely on other media sources, including the Russian-financed propaganda tools of Rossiya Segodnya.

The narrative went like this: "Nothing really works in our society any more: Our democracy is a failure, our media is manipulated and the Chancellor and the government are puppets of the US."

On top of the Russian media programmes, Moscow can turn to another propaganda source: the IRA or Internet Research Agency, a well-known "troll factory" in St Petersburg. According to US sources, its activity increased significantly during elections in Germany in 2017. Creating fake accounts and fake personalities, the trolls post comments meant to stoke controversy in online debates.

The most prominent of these virtual personalities was Jenna Abrams. Using this handle on Twitter, Jenna Abrams came across as a genuine person whose comments were quoted even in the New York Times and CNN.

Jenna Abrams, for instance, spread the false story that German Chancellor Angela Merkel once took a selfie with a refugee who later staged a terrorist attack.

After three years, Jenna Abrams disappeared.

President Putin has regularly denied that the Russian state is involved in the troll activities.

"We do not do that on a state level," he was quoted as saying in June 2017 on the sidelines of a conference in St Petersburg.

However, he did not rule out that "patriotic citizens" may make their own contributions to the Web.

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A damaged freight train standing on the Great Belt Bridge, which links Denmark's two main islands, after a train accident yesterday. Officials said six people were killed and 16 were injured. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Six killed in Denmark train crash

COPENHAGEN • Six people were killed in a rail accident on a bridge linking Denmark's two main islands yesterday when a train hit debris from an oncoming freight train, officials said.

Police said 16 people injured were not in critical condition.

The train was heading towards the capital with 131 passengers

when it hit what could have been tarpaulin or something else from the freight train on the tracks, said Banedanmark, which maintains and controls rail network traffic.

A preliminary investigation by the Danish Accident Investigation Board showed that a trailer had blown off a freight wagon onto the oncoming tracks, a spokesman said.

Police said it was too early to say what caused the accident but the train was damaged by goods on the tracks.

"There was a very, very loud bang and then the train stopped," a witness who had been on board the train with his daughter told Danish broadcaster TV2.

The accident happened shortly

before 7.35am (2.35pm Singapore time), police said in a statement.

TV footage showed the halted freight train carrying packaging for Danish beer maker Carlsberg.

A severe storm made it difficult for emergency services to reach the train which had stopped on the Great Belt fixed link between Zealand and Funen, Denmark's two

major islands.

"This morning's tragic accident on the Great Belt Bridge with many killed and wounded has shaken us all. Ordinary Danes on their way to work or on the way home from Christmas holidays have had their lives shattered," Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said in a tweet. REUTERS

Nasa probe 'phones home' as it reaches edge of solar system

TAMPA (Florida) • Nasa's New Horizons explorer has successfully "phoned home" after a journey to the most distant world ever explored by humankind, a frozen rock at the edge of the solar system that scientists hope will uncover secrets to its creation.

The nuclear-powered space probe has travelled 6.4 billion kilometres to come within 3,540km of Ultima Thule, an apparently peanut-shaped, 32km-long space rock in the uncharted heart of the Kuiper Belt.

The belt is a ring of icy celestial bodies just outside Neptune's orbit.

Engineers at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Maryland cheered when the space-craft's first signals came through the National Aeronautic and Space Agency's Deep Space Network late on Tuesday Singapore time.

"We have a healthy spacecraft," mission operations manager Alice Bowman declared.

The spacecraft will ping back more detailed images and data from Thule in the coming days, Nasa said.

Launched in January 2006, New Horizons embarked on its journey towards the solar system's edge to study the dwarf planet Pluto and its five moons.

"Last night, overnight, the United States spacecraft New Horizons conducted the farthest exploration in the history of humankind, and did so spectacularly," New Horizons principal investigator Alan Stern told a news conference at the Johns Hopkins facility in Laurel, Maryland.

An image of Thule, sent overnight and barely more detailed than previous images, deepens the mystery of whether Thule is a single rock shaped like a peanut or actually two rocks orbiting each other, "blurred together because of their proximity", Dr Stern said.

During a 2015 fly-by, the probe

found Pluto to be slightly larger than previously thought. In March, it revealed methane-rich dunes on

the icy planet's surface. Now 1.6 billion km beyond Pluto

for its second mission into the Kuiper Belt, New Horizons will study the makeup of Ultima Thule's atmosphere and terrain in a

months-long study to seek clues about the formation of the solar system and its planets.

Scientists had not discovered Ultima Thule when the probe was launched, according to Nasa, making the mission unique in that respect. In 2014, astronomers found Thule using the Hubble Space Telescope and the following year selected it for New Horizons' extended mission.

As the probe flies 3,500km above Thule's surface, scientists hope it will detect the chemical composition of its atmosphere and terrain in what Nasa says will be the closest observation of a body so remote.

While the mission marks the farthest close encounter of an object within our solar system, Nasa's Voyager 1 and 2, a pair of deep-space probes launched in 1977, have reached greater distances on a mission to survey extrasolar bodies. Both probes are still operational. REUTERS



New Horizons project scientist Hal Weaver (right) of the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory is seen in a Nasa photo high-fiving a team member on New Year's Day after receiving confirmation that New Horizons has completed a fly-by of Ultima Thule. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Dismay for Syrian rebels as Assad set for victory

Opposition feels 'abandoned' by international community after US pullout, Arab overtures

BEIRUT • Almost eight years into Syria's devastating war, opponents of the regime are watching in dismay as President Bashar al-Assad's government looks set to secure its comeback at home and abroad.

Holed up in the last major rebel stronghold or unable to return home after fleeing abroad, they are frustrated at being abandoned by the international community.

"Today, I'm looking for a homeland," activist Shady Matar said from exile in neighbouring Turkey.

"I can't go home while the regime is still in power," said the 27-year-old, whose hometown of Daraya near Damascus was retaken by the government in 2016.

"Most countries whose governments say they support the Syrian people have closed their borders" to them, he said.

Sparked by the brutal repression of anti-Assad protests in 2011, the conflict has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions at home and abroad.

But fighting has failed to topple Mr Assad. Endless diplomatic efforts have been unable to reach a peaceful transition and the regime now appears stronger than ever.

With backing from Russia and Iran, the government has expelled

rebels and extremists from large parts of Syria, and now controls almost two-thirds of the country.

The government also looks set to increase its influence in large swathes of territory under Kurdish-led control after the shock announcement last month of a US military pullout.

On the diplomatic front, efforts seem under way to bring the Damascus regime back into the Arab fold after years of frosty relations.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011 as the death toll mounted and several regional powers bet on the demise of the Assad regime.

But Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir last month made the first

Sparked by the brutal repression of anti-Assad protests in 2011, the conflict has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions at home and abroad.

visit by an Arab leader to Damascus since the start of the conflict.

Last week, the United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in the Syrian capital, and Bahrain followed suit.

Mr Bilal Bayush, an activist in the last major rebel stronghold of Idlib, said he was not surprised.

"Their interests with the opposition have ended, and they now have interests with the Assad regime," he said.

The opposition's chief negotiator Nasr al-Hariri was outraged.

"While our people are dying of cold in refugee camps, drowning in cold winter rain, some of our Arab brothers are racing to open up to the criminal who is responsible," he said last week on Twitter.

"Yes, Bashar the criminal may win, he may triumph in the face of the colluding international community," he wrote. "But he has not and will not defeat the will of the free Syrian people."

He said a solution in Syria required "a real political transition and holding the criminals to account".

Endless rounds of United Nations-brokered peace talks have failed to stem the bloodshed.

The armed opposition is faring no better on the ground.

In Idlib, rebels and Islamists have been hemmed in by a buffer zone under a September deal between Russia and Turkey to avert a massive regime offensive there.

It was the latest agreement to be reached under the Russia-Iran-Turkey negotiations track.

Analyst Nawal Oliver said the opposition - both political and armed - was in dire straits. He added: "The military opposition has no choice except to follow what is decided on an international level."

Mr Naji Mustafa, a spokesman for the National Liberation Front rebel group in Idlib, said the international community has abandoned the Syrian opposition.

"The revolution has been orphaned."

But in the town of Azaz, lawyer and activist Muthana Nasser was determined that years of death and destruction would not go to waste.

"The sacrifices and suffering of Syrians will not be in vain," he said.

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Activists gathering outside Croatia's Parliament building on Oct 19 to highlight women's traumatic hospital experiences. A tide of #MeToo testimonies about such experiences is rippling across the Balkans. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

#MeToo movement in Balkans focuses on hospital humiliation

ZAGREB (Croatia) • A tide of #MeToo testimonies about painful gynaecological procedures and abusive medical staff is rippling across the Balkans, where women are breaking taboos in patriarchal societies to share their traumatic hospital experiences.

The outcry was sparked by one female politician's emotional account of an agonising treatment she received after a miscarriage, shocking many in a region where sexual health is rarely discussed in the public sphere.

"They tied my arms and legs and started a curettage without anaesthesia... These were the 30 most horrible minutes of my life," Croatian MP Ivana Nincevic-Lesandric told a male-dominated Parliament last October.

"I could tell you about every second as each was lasting an eternity," she said of the surgery that

involves scraping tissue from the uterus and is often performed after a miscarriage or abortion.

"Do you plan to change this and when?" she challenged Health Minister Milan Kujundzic.

Arguing that "this is not how Croatian patients proceed", the minister pledged to investigate the case, while the hospital where she was treated rejected her claims.

But Croatian women came to her defence, with hundreds offering testimonies of similarly painful and humiliating experiences during gynaecological procedures.

The outcry in Croatia inspired a wave of similar grievances across the region. In neighbouring Bosnia, the Natural Birth non-governmental organisation (NGO) received more than 300 testimonies from women on painful gynaecological procedures in just 10 days.

"Maternity wards are the last places of institutional violence against women," the NGO's president, Sarajevo doctor Amira Cerimagic, said.

The stories are similar in Serbia, where "women enter maternity wards mostly frightened and leave very often with traumas", Ms Jovana Ruzicic, of Belgrade-based Centre for Moms, said.

A 2015 survey showed that 10 per cent of Serbian women "do not want to have another child ever due to a traumatic hospital experience with the first child", she said.

In Zagreb, Ms Nincevic-Lesandric said she did not expect such a strong response to her testimony.

"Women have managed, unfortunately due to traumatic experience, to raise awareness of the problem to the level that every woman knows her rights and what should not happen to her," she said.

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Swimmers running into the North Sea for the New Year's Day swimming event on Norderney Island off Germany, while revellers (below) join the traditional "bain des givres" at Malo-les-Bains beach in France. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A chilly dip to welcome the New Year

PARIS • From Edinburgh to Lisbon by way of Berlin, the chilly thrill of a New Year's dip appealed to many looking for a bracing way to ring in 2019.

How cold? "Nine or nine-ten (deg C), but it's fine, it feels good," said Claudy, who took part with around 1,000 others in the annual rite at Malo-les-Bains, northern France.

Similar scenes played out elsewhere in Europe, some themed, others not, with the common denominator a willingness to take the plunge as others cheer from the shore wearing woolen caps and gloves.

Costumes and glasses of champagne are often part of the fun, though many simply donned a bathing suit and cap and dove in.

In the Netherlands, a crowd of about 10,000 had a swim in the North Sea at Scheveningen, where the water was a frosty 7 deg C and an epic beach bonfire more than 40m high had showered nearby streets with burning embers on New Year's Eve.

These days, the event is also a fund-raiser for local charities, with evening gowns replacing bathing suits and a Donald Trump lookalike posing for photos.

Further north, at Norderney Island off the German coast, the North Sea was just 5 deg C, but 500 people of all ages jumped in just the same.

In the German capital, 11 "Berliner Seehund" (Berlin seals) honoured their swim club's tradition in the Orankee lake.

The annual "Loony Dook" near

Edinburgh drew several hundred to the Forth river for a dip that began in 1987 when two friends decided it was a good way to sober up after the indulgences of New Year's Eve.

These days, the event is also a fund-raiser for local charities, with evening gowns replacing bathing suits and a Donald Trump lookalike posing for photos.

In the slightly warmer waters of Portugal, Santa Clauses, jailbirds and football players frolicked in the waves of Carcavelos beach near Lisbon, while in Cap d'Agde, southern France, several swimmers ensured that the local tradition of skinny dipping sent the old year out without a stitch.

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OPINION

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The Straits Times says

Braced for economic headwinds this year

Last year was a better-than-expected year for the Singapore economy, but given the uncertainties that lie ahead, projections for 2019 are more circumspect, and for good reason. In his new year message, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the economy grew by 3.3 per cent last year, slightly below the 3.6 per cent growth achieved in 2017, but closer to the upper end of the 3 to 3.5 per cent growth forecast by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI). For 2019, the MTI is predicting growth to come in between 1.5 and 3.5 per cent. The wider-than-usual range suggests that the ministry is building in a substantial margin to allow for downside risk. A survey by the Monetary Authority of Singapore of 23 private economists who

track the Singapore economy and which was released last month found that they project growth for 2019 at 2.6 per cent – almost at the mid-point of MTI's forecast.

The top risk cited by economists is trade tensions, particularly between the United States and China. These tensions are on hold, under a truce that is supposed to last until March. But as of now, there is no telling what will happen thereafter. US President Donald Trump has hinted that a major trade deal is in the works, but its shape and scope are unclear. It is also unlikely that the complex and wide-ranging trade issues between the US and China can be resolved easily or soon. In any event, China's economy is slowing: Growth in the second

and third quarters of 2018 was lower than in the first. Most economists expect the slowdown will continue into this year, citing a fall in export orders in the second half of 2018 and sharp declines in consumption tax revenues in October and November. A slowing Chinese economy means lower import demand, which will impact not just the Singapore economy but also regional supply chains. An economic slowdown is also on the cards for the US. The stimulus from the tax cuts enacted by the Trump administration is likely to wear off this year and the US Federal Reserve has indicated it will hike twice in 2019 after four hikes last year. The European Union is also bracing itself for slower growth, which Britain's departure from

the bloc – due to happen in March – will likely intensify. There are not many positives in the global economy to compensate for these headwinds.

The only upside surprises could be a major breakthrough in the US-China trade talks, a pause in rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve – which the financial markets would welcome – and some diversion of trade and investment from China to South-east Asia, which could help offset part of the negative impact of China's economic slowdown. As such, 2019 will not be a year in which Singapore can expect to count on a buoyant global economy. It is a year to continue building economic and social resilience, and the capabilities to ride the next upturn, when it comes.

HomeFront

Only in Primary 4 and told to prepare for PSLE

Despite recent curriculum changes, the stressful PSLE remains and likely the age-old obsession over grades too



Irene Tham

Senior Tech Correspondent

My nine-year-old daughter Ollie entered Primary 4 this year.

Now begins a step-up in difficulty, as the prepping for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), a major exam to be taken when she is in Primary 6, officially starts.

Yes, the preparation begins now, two years before the exam takes place.

Recently announced changes have started to kick in this year to make it less stressful, but most of them don't apply to Ollie.

The only thing relevant to her is a change in the PSLE scoring system – from one based on aggregate scores to wider scoring bands.

Ollie will be among the first batch of students to take the PSLE under this new approach in 2021.

Even then, I still feel a sense of dread because the quintessentially Singaporean benchmark – for all its brevity – is still hanging over her head.

Indeed, even before my daughter reached this milestone transition to studying for the PSLE in earnest, friends had advised me to book maths and science tutors early.

They pointed out that the curriculum accelerates from Primary 4, leaving little room for any missteps by the child.

If any non-performance is not addressed quickly, she will find it hard to catch up later.

Cramming will also intensify in Primary 5 as students will also be taught the Primary 6 curriculum.

Many primary schools want more time to revise for the PSLE in the final year.

Last September, Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung announced a slew of changes to de-emphasise academic grades.

He said then he hoped to bring back the joy of learning, which would have a lasting impact on children. The question is, though: Will these moves be effective, or is a more drastic overhaul needed?

STRESS DELAYED, NOT REMOVED

Among the recently announced changes, Primary 1 and 2 pupils will no longer have exams or weighted

tests from this year.

Mid-year exams for pupils in Primary 3 and 5 will also be removed by 2021 to give students a chance to adapt to new subjects.

The upside of fewer exams – less stress and more curriculum time as teachers would not have to set and mark exam papers.

Plus, report books will no longer state the class and level rankings of a student at both primary and secondary levels, so learning will not be seen as a race.

These moves rightly recognise that foisting tests on young children produces results that are not conclusive of a child's potential or development.

There is but one spanner in the works – PSLE. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has said it is retaining it, despite some calls for it to be scrapped. Parents believe that the focus on grades will not let up as long as there is the PSLE.

In a letter published on Oct 2 last year in The Straits Times Forum page, Mr Jason Lee Wei Him wrote: "While taking away exams for Primary 1 and 2 pupils is a good way to give them time to enjoy learning, it may just push the stress further down the road, since they would still have to deal with the rigours of the PSLE."

Now that I've plunged into this PSLE race, the pressure I'm facing as a working mother cannot be underestimated.

For starters, Ollie's Chinese teacher had asked me to take time off work to help with my daughter's Chinese revision – daily, if possible – due to the step-up in difficulty and the sheer volume of curriculum to cover.

Ollie scored 68 marks – thus a Band 3 – in her Chinese exam last year.

TOO SOON, TOO NARROW

While the PSLE is far from perfect, the MOE wants to keep it to take stock of a child's learning, and allocate priority for secondary school selection in a fair and transparent way.

Mr Ong told Parliament in July last year: "It happens also to be the most meritocratic, and probably the most fair of all imperfect systems. If we scrap it, whatever we replace it with to decide on secondary school postings, I think it is likely to be worse."

The current grading system for the PSLE gives each child an aggregate score based on how she performs in each subject, relative to her peers. Since every child gets a concrete mark based on pen-and-paper exams, the PSLE



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

has been lauded as a tool to provide those who studied hard, especially working-class kids, a chance to enter brand-name secondary schools if they score well.

Unlike entrance based on interviews or project work, for example, an exam can provide a level field for students regardless of their family background.

But many parents and education experts have questioned if it is too early to make all 12-year-olds, who are still developing their abilities and interests, sit such a high-stakes exam. The system unfairly penalises late bloomers on a massive scale.

There are also concerns that the PSLE unfairly favours those who are good in the science, technology, engineering and maths (Stem) disciplines rather than, for example, the arts or areas where intangible skills like empathy rise to the fore.

In an age where artificial intelligence is making greater inroads in the workforce, there will still be jobs which only humans can

do. Healthcare, education, and hospitality and tourism are sectors where human empathy is required.

Changes made to the PSLE over the years contributed to the skew towards Stem.

In 1972, history and geography were removed from the PSLE.

In 1985, equal weighting was assigned to the four subjects being tested – English, maths, science and a second language – whereas before, languages were given double weighting.

In contrast, the O levels strike a better balance between humanities and science, and are administered to children who, at 16, are a lot more developed.

From 2021, the PSLE scoring system will change.

Instead of one aggregate score, students will be assigned scoring bands.

A mark of at least 90 will count as Achievement Level 1.

The best score will thus be four.

There is no longer a numerical aggregate score based on total

marks, reducing the incentive for a child to chase the highest possible marks for all subjects.

But even with the change in the PSLE scoring system from 2021, the race is unlikely to become less intense.

For one, students still need to get at least 90 marks for the best score of Achievement Level 1.

Even if Ollie is good in maths, science and English, I worry her Chinese will pull down her overall performance.

So my dilemma is whether to pack her schedule with more Chinese tuition, which many parents I know are doing.

The same could be said for maths. I'm still monitoring to see if Ollie requires extra help.

Whether the score is an aggregate score or from Achievement Level bands, pupils will still be compared with – and have to compete with – their peers. Better scorers will get the places in popular schools.

And parents are likely to continue to over-prepare their children.

Fixing the PSLE grading system does not solve the bigger problem

of Singapore's obsession with grades.

THROUGH-TRAIN APPROACH

If the MOE's goal is to provide a general education in the first 10 years for children aged seven to 16, why not roll out a "through-train" programme from primary to secondary levels?

Through-train programmes are not new to Singapore. The MOE just needs to tweak its existing programmes to accommodate a through-train programme from primary to secondary levels.

This means making the O levels compulsory and possibly rolling back the Integrated Programme, a scheme that allows high-performing students in secondary schools in Singapore to skip the O-level exams.

Scrapping the PSLE and delaying the first major national exams until the O levels would make Singapore's system a lot closer to that in Finland, which is well known for its education system.

Finland is a place where students do well in global education rankings but have no major exams until the age of 18.

Singapore, which has sent education officials on learning trips to Finland, could pick up a lesson or two from the Nordic country.

Not only does using academic grades to allocate priority for secondary school admission stream children too early in life, the PSLE is also an outdated mechanism.

Today's high literacy rate has turned the PSLE into a different tool from what it was first created to do. Last year, 98.4 per cent of the 39,672 pupils who took the PSLE progressed to secondary schools.

It matched the passing rate in 2016 and 2017 – the best performance in Singapore's history.

In contrast, when the PSLE was first held in 1960, slightly less than half of the 30,615 candidates passed and were placed in secondary schools. Those who failed were put in vocational training so they could find jobs as craftsmen or technicians.

How about the argument that one needs a national sorting exam like the PSLE to identify weaker or brighter students and cater to them? This can still be done if the PSLE is scrapped and students go automatically from primary to secondary school.

For instance, the Gifted Education Programme has been running for some 34 years now, sifting out the top 1 per cent of intellectually gifted children at the age of nine. Selected students sit for specialised tests in English, maths and general ability.

Those who do well are put in a rigorous programme to stretch their mental capabilities.

Equal opportunities can still be provided to all children regardless of their background through such optional programmes, without making every child sit for a high-stakes national exam at a young age.

The lofty goal of focusing on one's own learning and intrinsic potential rather than engaging in a race will be possible at a national level only if the PSLE is abolished.

Only then can our children stop to smell the flowers and not just study them.

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Stop seeing people as problems. They're assets who build social capital

In Singapore, social services help those at the margin. But there's a different way to do things: Create an environment of mutual help where no one feels displaced, rather than one that helps the displaced fit in.

Gerard Ee

In the 1980s when I was a youth worker, young people who did not have the benefit of succeeding in school got on in life by taking up a trade. If they were willing, it would not have been difficult, by word of mouth, to find plumbers, carpenters, electricians or other craftsmen to take them on as apprentices. Most of the youth who came to my programmes started off as painters and along the way picked up other skills that served them well in blue-collar work. Regardless of their personal or family challenges, they were optimistic that they would find a way to make a living and to build a life.

These youth were more than aware of their low-income background, their lack of formal education and their challenges with the English language, our lingua franca, but they believed that with the support of family and friends they would make progress. This was a belief rooted in the strength of social capital.

SERVICES REPLACE NATURAL NETWORKS

Today, the structure of our economy and the demographics of our country are very different, and these realities exacerbate the disadvantages faced by our fellow citizens who lack formal education, those who are in the lower social economic strata, let alone those with ill health or disabilities.

Caring for our fellow citizens on the margins is a perennial challenge, but the challenge I would like to highlight is the way we have been dealing with it in recent years.

According to the Ministry of Social and Family Development website, there are currently more than 10,200 people employed in the social and community service sector and "it is a growing one with ample employment opportunities". The proliferation of services competes with natural support networks, replaces the notion of a caring community and its self-directed problem-solving, and does nothing to weave the social fabric that binds us as a cohesive society. Nor does it comfort those on the margins that they actually have a relationship or a bond with the mainstream, as service consumption is often experienced as being problematised, fenced out and contained in isolation.

The current social service ecosystem is designed on the basis of helping people to cope with their environment. There is a focus on psychology and it operates on the belief that problems require treatment or intervention provided by professionals or programmes.

There is little focus on the context, circumstances or structural issues that sustain these problems. There is also no acknowledgement that Singapore's need for immigration to compensate for low birth rates and a shrinking workforce, on the other hand, contributes to a plural society that further stresses those on the margins and reinforces their sense of displacement within their own country.

RALLY SOCIETY AROUND SOCIAL ISSUES

If social services are to serve as an important pillar for nation-building, then social inclusion and integration must be understood as efforts in creating an environment where no one feels displaced instead of simply trying to get the displaced to fit in.

We must regard social issues not simply as problems to be fixed, but also as opportunities to rally society towards a common goal as well as a shared future that is mutually satisfying and meaningful. It is an opportunity to weave and strengthen the social fabric among people from different backgrounds and reduce the threats and ill effects that a plural society presents.

To achieve this, we must re-imagine the role of the social sector as one that increases the social capital within our country, rather than one that simply services those on the margins.



To help low-income families earn some income, Beyond Social Services, through its seasonal festive baking projects, secures orders from corporations for cookies as gifts during festive periods. To handle the large orders, it cooperates with Caritas Singapore, the social and charitable arm of the Catholic Church, to offer the use of its baking facility at Agape Village for free. This initiative is one where success is a collective community effort, says the writer. PHOTO: AGAPE VILLAGE-CARITAS SINGAPORE

It works at creating context and conditions that enable people from different segments and social strata to develop mutual trust and co-create solutions where they have an active role in their success.

When people come together to own and act on their shared concerns, they will experience a sense of connectedness and contentment which closes the social divide among them. For those on the margins, these relationships would be important in bridging the social capital that provides them with opportunities and resources to raise their sense of well-being.

Why should we do that? We live in an imperfect and unequal world, but resentment and resignation among people set in when people, especially those on the margins, do not believe that their lives can change for the better.

Social services, when positioned to help those who have fallen behind, are inherently communicating that their users have failed to fit in or to contribute to the larger scheme of things.

This is reinforced when the process of accessing resources requires service users to accentuate their needs. This makes the people involved feel like they or their situations are problems. They constantly surface "needs", which are the raw materials for the proliferation of service provision.

COMBINE STRENGTHS TO BUILD VALUE

A different paradigm in creating social services is to think of it as holding a space where a diverse group of people come together to make a difference to themselves and the group in a way they cannot when they act merely as individuals. It is inviting people to pool their strengths, gifts and talents in a manner that they find satisfying and meaningful.

In this vein, problem-solving efforts then become organised around the belief that all people, despite their challenges and often because of their challenges, have the potential to lead positive change.

Regardless, all of us have something of value to contribute and together we can build the community and country we want to belong to and live in.

In the public rental neighbourhoods my organisation works within, residents young and old are encouraged to gain an awareness of their shared concerns, deepen their understanding of the issues at hand, assume ownership of the situation and take action. With the support of volunteers and resources from the larger community, parents and youth come together to address issues such as poor school attendance, care and supervision of

children, and substance use. As a result, parents coordinate learning and social programmes as well as organise themselves to support neighbours experiencing difficulties.

People demonstrate leadership in surprisingly large measures, and neighbourhoods start to have a climate of kindness, generosity, cooperation and forgiveness. People have a sense that together with neighbours and others in the Singapore community, they are making life better for all.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS FOR CHANGE

Let me illustrate this paradigm with a tangible example: The Community Tabung is a savings programme that encourages low-income families to top up their children's Child Development Account (CDA). Once a month on Tabung Counting Day, the children pour their savings into a common pool in the presence of their parents and volunteers.

The total amount is then divided equally among all who participated. Each child's amount is trebled by a donor and when deposited into the child's CDA, the initial shared savings would have multiplied six times at the end of the process, as contributions to the account are matched by the Government.

This programme has been designed to encourage personal and collective responsibility and, while savings are important, there is much value in the conversations people have about it and the relationships formed among all involved. Participants safeguard the practice of sharing the pooled savings equally as they appreciate the ebb and flow of life. Thus, being a part of a community where there is much "give and take" is comforting and satisfying. On counting days, parents, donors and volunteers cooperate to get things going and the experience of organising a successful event is mutually rewarding. Also, as parents get to know one another, they begin looking out for one another's children.

Another initiative where success is a collective community effort would be our seasonal festive baking projects. To help low-income families earn some income, we secure orders of cookies from corporations as gifts during the festive periods. To handle the large orders, we cooperate with Caritas Singapore, the social and charitable arm of the Catholic Church, to offer the use of its baking facility at Agape Village for free. Then, we welcome representatives from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore to perform Sertu, a cleansing ritual which assures Muslims that the cookies prepared will be appropriate for their consumption.

Also, as suppliers grant substantial discounts and volunteers offer labour and expertise, the low-income families have come to see that while hard work is necessary for success, it is not enough.

There is also social capital or friendships where even religious differences and vested interests are put aside to facilitate success.

In the current mainstream social service ecosystem, the goal is for those facing difficulties to behave differently and the significant relationship for them is the one they have with the professional assigned to assist them.

Help is the domain of this expert and, even if the difficulties are resolved, the approach does not build social capital that enhances the beneficiaries' resilience or an improved perception of their circumstances.

However, when the goal is for the community and society to behave differently and when relationships between neighbours and fellow citizens have a significant impact on one's well-being, our social fabric is strengthened.

NETWORK OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Does this social capital-driven paradigm work? There is further evidence. In 2016, we embarked on a study to understand the value of our efforts in bridging low-income neighbourhoods with resources and relationships. After a year, there was positive impact on residents' personal empowerment, their network of support and social connection, and their perception of neighbourhood characteristics. Respondents felt there was a sense of community where they lived and mutual trust among neighbours.

Our work covers some 60 public rental blocks and our

relationship with government grassroots leaders is a hygiene factor for our continued presence. Where this relationship was not well established, our efforts made little headway. Otherwise, our work has been facilitated with the access to rooms, event halls and spaces for community engagement that those grassroots leaders help us with.

So, with these points in mind, let me make four recommendations to those facing difficulties to behave differently and the significant relationship for them is the one they have with the professional assigned to assist them.

Help is the domain of this expert and, even if the difficulties are resolved, the approach does not build social capital that enhances the beneficiaries' resilience or an improved perception of their circumstances.

However, when the goal is for the community and society to behave differently and when relationships between neighbours and fellow citizens have a significant impact on one's well-being, our social fabric is strengthened.

RETAINING COMMUNITY SPACES FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The first recommendation is for the 4G leaders to safeguard community resources and infrastructure for the benefit of efforts that bring those on the margins towards the centre of the community.

I find it disturbing to see community centres being leased out to fast-food operators and other businesses. Surely, residents can go to the mall in the town centre should they desire such products, and surely the community centre management can utilise its facilities to reach out to residents who may find it difficult or not gratifying to visit the mall as a routine. In any case, community development and resident engagement can certainly be more than making it convenient for people to get fast food.

The optimising of community resources for rental revenue gives the impression that the Government is subsidising business at the expense of meaningful community engagement and development, as it is not transparent how the revenue is ploughed back into the community, apart from maintaining infrastructure. It also signals the depreciation of the community as its space is being encroached upon or even colonised by commercial interests. If this is not the correct impression or intent, the leaders should reassess some of their positions or decisions in these areas.

HARNESS COMMUNITY COMPETENCE TO CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS

Next, our 4G leaders must safeguard the notion of community as one that has the competence to resolve its challenges – a place where people can give and receive support and build a satisfying and meaningful life as described above.

Hence, the coordination of social services should put the power and decision-making of the people at the front and centre of all efforts. Neighbours, families, friends and constituents, in spite of their own problems, can be equipped to act as

front-line responders for those experiencing difficulties.

Leadership, in this light, is about convening gatherings where people from different socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicity can understand one another better and co-create solutions. The different gifts and relationships among constituents should be mapped and inventories should be set up and updated regularly; these gifts and relationships should be celebrated, activated and treasured as assets that a community can draw upon to solve its own problems or enrich its life.

RETURN PROBLEMS TO THE PEOPLE

To activate a community's assets, the 4G leaders must also safeguard the transparency of concerns.

What does this mean? Unless concerns are clearly defined and acknowledged, people cannot or will not see the need to cooperate and resolve them. Usually when concerns are raised, our leaders cite a programme or scheme that is already dealing with it. This says that the status quo is good enough and no improvements are necessary.

I would suggest that the social service sector be an advocate that draws people's attention to the challenges facing citizens living on the margins. Then, instead of recommending expert industry solutions, enable people to respond in a way where they can utilise their own competencies and social capital.

This transparency of concerns would mean returning the problems to the people so that they can appreciate the implications and strengthen their sense of agency or ability to act on them.

Leadership is about listening to the aspirations and factors that people find motivating and then connecting them to resources and relationships as a way of fuelling their work.

WINNING TOGETHER

Lastly, our 4G leaders must safeguard a narrative of "finishing well together". Our leaders often use football and other sporting analogies to explain their roles and responsibilities. In sport, we must play to win and while winners are adored, so are the values of fair play, sportsmanship, mutual respect, friendship and solidarity among sportsmen, all of which define the context for excellence.

To draw on the philosophy of the Olympic movement, we must "create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles".

Our collective goal must be for everyone to reach the "finish line" of being recognised as a valuable citizen with much to contribute. The social service sector must stand together with those who have crossed the finish line to applaud those still running towards it as they make the effort to do the same.

CONCLUSION

I have presented four areas requiring guardianship and if they are indeed well safeguarded, the social service sector would have woven a social fabric that can be a safety net or trampoline for those on the margins. At the same time, there would be heightened awareness and understanding of our social challenges across society. Also, people will not shy away from reclaiming these challenges as their own and, as a result, will start organising themselves to act on them.

One visible indicator that we are succeeding will be the nature of the annual Social Service Summit. Instead of it being attended only by social service professionals and leaders of social service organisations, it will feature those who have come together as a community to address their shared concerns. Leaders in the social service sector will be able to quantify how these efforts have contributed to nation-building and fortify the bedrock of compassion, social justice and community that social work is built upon.

• Gerard Ee, a social work veteran, is executive director of Beyond Social Services.

• This article first appeared in the latest volume of Commentary, a journal from the National University of Singapore Society.

Malaysia's economic prospects dim amid rising political unease



Leslie Lopez

Regional Correspondent

New Malaysia is finding it tough to shake off some old baggage.

Race tensions, political wrangling within the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition government and growing anxiousness over the country's leadership succession are dimming the prospects for 2019 amid growing domestic and external economic headwinds.

Topping the list of the economic concerns is the prospect of a downgrade in the country's long-held A rating for international sovereign borrowing.

The government's high debt holdings, inherited from the previous administration, and lower-than-expected revenue receipts in 2019 are likely to put a cap on development spending that has helped generate economic activity in the past.

Against such a backdrop, it is no surprise that Japan's Nomura Research, which has warned investors of a possible downgrade in Malaysia's sovereign ratings, has forecast economic expansion to slow to 4 per cent in 2019, down from the expected 4.7 per cent this year and 5.9 per cent in 2017.

Deutsche Bank Research, which has also flagged sovereign rating concerns, has pegged 2018 gross domestic product at 4.4 per cent this year and 4 per cent in 2020.

International rating agencies have so far been restrained because of pledges from the PH government led by Premier Mahathir Mohamad to improve governance, curb excesses and tackle widespread corruption in government. But their patience, and that of Malaysians in general, is wearing thin because of the government's failure to deliver on the economic front and honour its many elections pledges.

Here is what ails the PH government:

- The ideologically-diverse PH coalition – hastily cobbled together to eject the long-standing Barisan Nasional in last May's general election – is



Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah at a Parliament session last year. A Cabinet reshuffle is widely expected in the coming months and that would test the already delicate power-sharing formula within the Pakatan Harapan coalition, further stressing Malaysia's political grief. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

showing increasing signs of strain due to internal rivalries. Of particular concern is the growing tensions between Malaysia's presumptive successor Anwar Ibrahim, who is president of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), or the People's Justice Party, and his deputy Mohamed Azmin Ali, who is also the country's powerful Economics Affairs Minister. PKR, with its 50 parliamentary seats, is the largest component in the PH coalition and an internal party split could have far-reaching ramifications to the already fragile coalition government.

• Another glaring PH weakness is the lack of experience its leaders that dominate Malaysian Cabinet

have in matters of governance. Many remain trapped in the opposition mindset of issuing statements, sometimes against fellow Cabinet colleagues, instead of crafting reform policies.

• The new government is also discovering that powerful elements within the civil service, loyal to the previous BN administration, have quietly fought back with red-tape tactics that have blocked reform efforts, such as bringing more transparency to state procurement practices that have long been plagued by political favouritism.

As the PH coalition government

struggles to find its footing, Malaysians, particularly the country's politically dominant ethnic Malays that make up more than 60 per cent of the population, are growing restive.

The PH coalition won the popular vote in the May general election. But independent analysis of the results by polling outfits, such as Merdeka Centre, showed that nearly 70 per cent of the Malays threw their support behind the United Malays National Organisation (Umno) party, which is the linchpin of the previous BN government, and the country's main Islamic opposition party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia, or Pas.

Senior PH leaders privately

acknowledge that the coalition's appeal among the Malays remains lukewarm at best.

Remedying the twin confronts of a less-than-hospitable civil service and its flagging support from the Malays will require some tough decisions in the coming months, which could see Tun Dr Mahathir assert his role as Premier at the risk of upsetting his partners in the PH coalition.

A Cabinet reshuffle is widely expected in the coming months and that would test the already delicate power-sharing formula within the PH coalition, further stressing Malaysia's political grief.

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Why Trump should listen to the old guard

Carol Giacomo

They are in their 80s and 90s now, national security titans from years past when certain values were broadly shared, like the imperative of America's global leadership and the nation's commitment to democracy, diplomacy and the North Atlantic alliance.

And with former president George H.W. Bush gone, it's hard not to wonder how the tenor of American foreign policy discourse will change as the leaders of this bipartisan old guard – Republicans Henry Kissinger (95), George Shultz (98), James Baker (88), Colin Powell (81) and Richard Lugar (86); Democrats Madeleine Albright (81), Sam Nunn (80), William Perry (91) and Lee Hamilton (87) – also disappear from the scene.

In various ways, they have continued to try to shape national security policy even after leaving office. All are moderates reflecting varying realist, internationalist, pragmatic and political tendencies.

They value America's alliances, especially with Europe; believe in American strength but not winner-take-all dominance; support working within the United Nations and other multinational institutions; understand the sustained effort needed to build trust with friends and manage adversaries; include human rights and rule of law as part of the agenda; and recognise the limits of cozying

up to despots. Some of these values – particularly the last – were observed mainly in the breach when these officials held high office.

While we will mourn the passing of members of this generation and their ideals, we should not canonise them. All made mistakes, starting with Dr Kissinger, the grand strategist who was national security adviser and secretary of state under president Richard Nixon, a Republican, and will be forever

stained by the needless bloodshed in Vietnam and clandestine support for the vicious coup in Chile. Still, individually and sometimes in groups, they have brought reason, experience and a sense of history to bear on national security debates.

That's a valuable contribution in an era when President Donald Trump and his enablers are

trampling on the values, norms, institutions, treaties and relationships that have maintained

Western stability and democracy

for decades. Mr Trump may not

care what these grey eminences have to say, but Congress and the public should listen and learn.

One place to start is with the essay written by Mr Shultz, who served as secretary of state, the Treasury and labour, and Mr Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet leader, in The Washington Post this month after the Trump administration announced it would begin withdrawing from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the first to eliminate

an entire class of nuclear weapons. Along with president Ronald

Reagan, Mr Shultz and Mr Gorbachev were central to Cold War efforts to reduce the risk of nuclear war, and they are now pleading with Mr Trump not to abandon the treaty but to "preserve and fix it". The alternative, they argue, is "a new arms race, undermining strategic stability and increasing the threat of miscalculation or technical failure leading to an immensely destructive war".

I cut my foreign policy teeth as a correspondent for Reuters first covering Congress, then travelling the world with eight secretaries of state, starting with Mr Shultz in the late 1980s. After interviewing him, I struggled to devise questions that would make news while avoiding a filibuster on foreign policy arcania. I usually failed, and I'm richer for it.

Overtime, Mr Shultz has continued to focus on nuclear weapons policy and in 2007 wrote a Wall Street Journal article with Dr Kissinger, Mr Perry, a Democrat and former defence secretary, and Mr Nunn, a former Democratic senator from Georgia. They called

for a world without nuclear weapons – a worthy goal, yet more remote today than ever. Nine

countries possess a total of 14,575

nuclear weapons, with the United States and Russia accounting for 92

per cent of them.

Mr Perry has also dedicated himself to the nuclear threat, warning that the risk of an accidental nuclear conflagration, especially from Russia, is greater

now than during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, General Powell, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and secretary of state, has defended existing arms control treaties and lamented that under the current administration, "we are not demonstrating the kind of inspirational broad-based leadership" of president George H.W. Bush and president Reagan.

Dr Albright, who escaped European fascism during World War II and, under president Bill Clinton, became the first female secretary of state, is now chairman of the National Democratic Institute, which works to strengthen democratic institutions worldwide. She has been outspoken in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and has been a

searing critic of Russian leader Vladimir Putin and the global

revival of fascist tendencies. Pulling

no punches, she called Mr Trump the most "undemocratic president in modern American history".

From Mr Hamilton, the former Indiana congressman and co-chairman of the Commission, and Mr Lugar, the former Indiana senator and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has come a call

for a renewed bipartisanship in foreign policy and a warning that

"our partisan divide leaves us weaker

as we face the world".

No member of this old guard has been as ubiquitous as Dr Kissinger. Though physically frail, he is still mentally acute and his insight is solicited by senior officials at home and abroad.

Having managed the opening to

China and detente with the Soviet Union, he is seized with exploring the future world order, making sure

China's rise does not end in conflict and raising questions about the unintended consequences of artificial intelligence. "I don't pretend to have the answers," he told The Financial Times in July.

Dr Kissinger has briefed Mr Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner, but has declined to render a verdict on their tenure. Still, he has moved from predicting "something remarkable and new" possibly emerging from Mr Trump's presidency to warning, in

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disappear from the scene.

The Financial Times, "I think we are in a very, very grave period for the world".

Then there is Mr James Baker, the former treasury secretary and White House chief of staff, who, empowered by president George H.W. Bush, was arguably the best secretary of state in the modern age, playing pivotal roles in German reunification, the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Madrid peace conference that brought Israelis and Arabs into direct talks for the first time.

He tends to avoid pointing a direct finger at Mr Trump, but the video message he delivered on receiving the annual excellence in

diplomacy award from the American Academy of Diplomacy in Washington, D. C. last month was unmistakable.

He warned that walking away from the multinational system created after World War II would produce "greater economic and strategic instability".

Then he laid down rules for effective diplomacy wholly at odds with Mr Trump's approach: Be discreet, since much important work between states is done in private. Pick your battles carefully. Compromise on small points in service of winning the important ones. Most successful agreements are based on mutual advantage, not zero-sum outcomes.

As these leaders pass from the scene, it will be left to a new generation to find a way forward from the wreckage Mr Trump has already created. NYTIMES

Asia in 2018: Winners and losers

Curtis S. Chin and Jose B. Collazo

It was a year that began with a dazzling Winter Olympics in South Korea, and included a summer of natural disasters in Japan and a devastating year-end tsunami in Indonesia.

2018 also saw a pause so far in North Korean missile tests, and efforts by United States President Donald Trump to reshape US-China ties and call out unfair Chinese business practices.

But at year's end, who was up and who was down in Asia in 2018? Here's our assessment of Asia's winners and losers:

WORST YEAR: XI JINPING – POWER ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

What a difference a year makes. With China's President Xi Jinping firmly in place as China's most powerful leader in decades, Mr Xi took "Best Year" in Asia in 2017 along with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. This year, the news wasn't so good for this would-be "new Mao in town" as challenges grew at home and abroad to his reign amid a slowing, though still growing, Chinese economy.

The beginning of the year saw the 65-year-old pushing through constitutional challenges that would give him the ability to serve as president for life. Mr Xi's own philosophy also was enshrined in China's Constitution – "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era".

But at year's end, Mr Xi's efforts to "Make China Great Again" were increasingly uncertain, as Mr Trump's non-traditional playbook threw up new challenges.

A 90-day pause in the ongoing US-China tariffs war may well end on March 1 with an increase to 25 per cent in tariffs on some US\$200 billion (\$273 billion) in Chinese goods, and the chief financial officer and daughter of the founder of China's most powerful tech company, Huawei, has been arrested in Canada for possible extradition to the US.

Despite Mr Trump's reputation for going it alone, the US leader also has helped usher in a new era of scrutiny of China's behaviour under Mr Xi in areas as diverse as its repression of the Uighur Muslim minority, militarisation of the South China Sea and accusations of debt diplomacy in its once highly touted Belt and Road Initiative.

2019 may well be another and better year and this, a temporary setback, but China's most powerful man takes "Worst Year in Asia" in 2018.

BAD YEAR: PRESS FREEDOM – A BAD SITUATION GETS WORSE

Telling the truth has always been an occupational hazard for journalists in much of Asia. The region as a whole has never fared well in rankings of press freedom, with China and Turkey routinely among the top jailers of journalists.

Unfortunately, this year saw an escalation of actions by state governments to silence journalists reporting on the realities of the region. In Myanmar, Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were sentenced to seven years in prison for violating the country's Official Secrets Act for reporting on a massacre of Rohingya Muslims. In Cambodia, a tax evasion charge was used to shut down the Cambodia Daily, an English language daily that covered what some call the country's "culture of impunity".

The same tactic is being used in the Philippines against Maria Ressa, chief of the social news network Rappler, which has relentlessly covered in often critical terms the



China's President Xi Jinping listening to a speech to mark the 40th year of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan in Beijing yesterday. At the end of 2018, his efforts to "Make China Great Again" were increasingly uncertain, as US President Donald Trump's non-traditional playbook threw up new challenges.

PHOTO: EPA-EFE



A file photo of journalist Maria Ressa speaking at a protest on press freedom, along with fellow journalists in Manila. She was among four individuals and a group of journalists named as Time magazine's "Person of the Year" for their roles as "guardians" of the truth.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shaking hands at the start of their historic summit meeting at the Capella Singapore hotel on Sentosa Island on June 12, 2018. Singapore shone brightly in the global spotlight last year. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. Ressa, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were among four individuals and a group of journalists named as Time magazine's "Person of the Year" for their roles as "guardians" of the truth.

In Bangladesh, photojournalist Shahidul Alam was jailed for criticising the country's prime minister, and China has arrested award-winning Chinese photographer Lu Guang, whose photos document the inequities in China's development.

These incidents don't even touch on the self-censorship that reporters in Asia may well practise to get even the basic news out to the public. Even once free-wheeling Hong Kong sent out a chilling message to the free press when Financial Times news editor Victor Mallet was denied renewal of his work visa and then blocked from even visiting as a tourist after he presided over a controversial Foreign Correspondents Club of Hong Kong talk. So much for reporting without fear or favour.

MIXED YEAR IN U.S.-ASIA TRADE – UNCERTAINTY ON BOTH SIDES OF THE PACIFIC

For years, the story of global trade seemed decidedly and uniformly positive as government and business leaders in the US and in Asia's largest trading nations focused on steadily growing numbers. US exports of goods to Asia totalled some US\$490 billion in 2017, according to US Department of Commerce data, and are likely to reach similar levels in 2018. The US also remains a powerhouse when it comes to services exports. That includes banking, insurance and technology services.

But 2018 brought new interpretations, and new tariffs, as Mr Trump brought new focus on those arguably made worse off by trade. The US President also drew attention to outdated World Trade Organisation rules and called out protectionism.

Mr Trump made clear that still growing trade deficits, particularly with China, mattered. Threats of tariffs between the US and China as well as the US and Japan, the world's top three economies, have contributed to a climate of disruption that is reshaping the

global economic and trading order we take for granted.

One sign of this volatility is the revisiting of critical supply chains that cut across continents and deliver everything from smartphones designed in California and manufactured and assembled in Asia to the soya beans American farmers have long sold to China. As supply chains shift, however, American consumers may well increasingly find "Made in China" replaced not by "Made in USA" but by "Made in Vietnam", "Made in Thailand", or somewhere else in a region unsettled by a "new normal" of uncertainty.

GOOD YEAR: SINGAPORE, THE LION CITY, STRUTS ITS STUFF ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

A city – make that city state – takes the honours in our rankings. But what a country the "Lion City" is. Singapore shone in the global spotlight and filled US television and movie screens as never before last year.

First it was the summit to end all summits. In June, Singapore played host to a landmark first meeting between President Trump and North Korea's Mr Kim. The two met to discuss the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, tuning down for now the rhetoric and seeming march to confrontation, and thousands gathered to watch and report, including some 2500 registered media. Then it was two key regional gatherings in November, when Singapore played host to the Asean Summit and the East Asia Summit, with US Vice-President Mike Pence filling in for President Trump.

In between, there was the blockbuster Warner Brothers film, *Crazy Rich Asians*. The film didn't just put Asian and Asian-American actors on the Hollywood screen but also dazzled viewers in the US and around the world with the sights and sounds of Singapore to the tune of nearly US\$240 million at the box office since its August release.

About two-thirds the size of New York City and home to more than 5.6 million Singaporeans, the Little Red Dot, as the tiny island nation of Singapore is also proudly referred to, offered up to the world a prosperous, orderly vision of

urbanisation at its best in 2018.

BEST YEAR: MAHATHIR MOHAMAD – A COMEBACK KID FOR THE AGES

Aged 73 at the time of his re-election, Mr Ronald Reagan is the oldest person elected as US president but he has nothing on Malaysia's new leader. At the ripe old age of 92, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad came out of retirement to defeat his one-time protege prime minister Najib Razak and once again, after 15 years, lead Malaysia – a south-east Asian nation of some 32 million people that is also the region's third

richest, after Indonesia and Thailand.

In a win for democracy, Malaysians, tired of corruption scandals and rising living costs, looked to Dr Mahathir, now the oldest state leader in the world, for a mix of continuity and change.

Najib is now under indictment for allegedly stealing millions from a state investment fund known as 1MDB. That, though, is only a small fraction of allegedly US\$4.5 billion laundered through US financial institutions and misspent.

Malaysia might not come up that often on most American's screens. But that too might well change as the film rights to a book, *Billion Dollar Whale: The Man Who Fooled Wall Street, Hollywood, and the World*, detailing the 1MDB scandal have been bought by SK Global, the production company behind the film *Crazy Rich Asians*.

In bringing back Dr Mahathir, Malaysia's voters took a stand on what US investigators have called "kleptocracy at its worst". Still, the comeback kid has a few more challenges ahead of him, including reforming his country's institutions, fixing its finances and paving the way for new leadership – difficult tasks for a man even half his age. There's no taking away though from a story that captured the region, and so we give "Best Year in Asia" to now Prime Minister Mahathir, a comeback kid for the ages.

• Curtis S. Chin, a former US ambassador to the Asian Development Bank, is managing director of advisory firm River Peak Group where Jose B. Collazo is South-east Asia analyst and associate.

Half a billion millennial voters are face of Asia 2019

Andy Mukherjee

In the first half of this year, a billion Asians will elect the next leaders of the region's two largest democracies.

Half – 400 million in India and 79 million in Indonesia – are from the millennial generation, born roughly between 1982 and 2001. Many will cast votes for the first time. Although the threat of sectarian hatred looms large over the Indian and Indonesian elections, economics will still take centre stage.

The issue that will resonate most with younger voters is jobs.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo will seek a second term on April 17, promising to "re-industrialise" the economy. The commodity boom that helped ameliorate high unemployment after the 1998 Asian crisis has faded. Without pushing into large-scale manufacturing and adding more value to the country's raw-materials exports, it's hard to see how municipalities with 9 per cent-plus joblessness in West Java can close the gap with the national average of around 5 per cent.

Jokowi, as the President is known, wants to keep spending on infrastructure, even though foreign direct investment is set for its first annual decline since he came to power in 2014. But his opponent, former general Prabowo Subianto, is striking a more nationalistic pose by vowing to review Chinese Belt and Road investments, including a signature high-speed rail project, if he comes to power. His solution for attracting more private investment is to slash taxes and government spending.

Lack of jobs and widespread agrarian distress are also the main campaign issues for Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi. He's looking to unseat Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his disastrous currency ban and a botched goods and services tax – moves that have hurt small firms and their workers disproportionately.

Since it's politically suicidal to cut fuel subsidies in an election year, both Mr Modi and Jokowi will hope global oil prices stay low. Indonesia's cash handouts to the poor will double this year. But with revenue growing strongly, the budget deficit is still expected to come in below 2 per cent of gross domestic product.

The same isn't true for India, though. Encouraged by his party's wins in recent state polls, Mr Gandhi is putting pressure on Mr Modi to waive farmers' loans. Meanwhile, PM Modi is wooing the middle class by pruning the list of items taxed at 28 per cent, the highest of the five GST rates. Even without the additional burden, the budget deficit in the fiscal year ending in March would struggle to meet the goal of 3.3 per cent of GDP. Elections will be held by May.

For both countries, the biggest "known unknown" of the year is the Federal Reserve's policy. If the Fed takes a pause only after three interest-rate increases this year, the Indian rupee and the Indonesian rupiah, Asia's two worst-performing currencies this year, could remain under pressure. In Indonesia, the risk is from the current account deficit, which at about 3.4 per cent of GDP, is already large. With prices of palm oil and natural rubber slumping, exports may be slow to revive.

In India, an abrupt change of guard at the central bank could lead to more relaxed financial conditions – perhaps even interest-rate cuts – to stoke credit-fuelled growth ahead of the election.

If the Fed sets the backdrop for the this year's Asian polls, Facebook could determine their tone, even outcomes. The social media platform has been under scrutiny ever since the Cambridge Analytica scandal, when it emerged that personal data of 87 million Facebook users were obtained by the consulting firm that had, among other things, helped get US President Donald Trump elected.

Analysts are dreading a repeat of the role social media played in securing a victory for far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. WhatsApp, the messaging service owned by Facebook, has 250 million users in India, which has seen murders and lynchings triggered by fake news.

Indonesian Communications and Information Technology Minister Rudiantara told me last year of his frustration over social media firms' slow and inadequate response to requests to take down offensive content. A third of his countrymen use Facebook.

How a billion Asian voters navigate around misinformation, fake news and a hardening of majority sentiment against minorities (Indonesia's ethnic Chinese and India's Muslims) on their way to the polling booths will be worth watching.

There will be a third important Asian election this year. Thailand's military junta, in power since May 2014, has decided to hand over power in polls scheduled for Feb 24. Considering that elected leaders keep getting unseated by the courts or the army, a durable democracy in Thailand would be a huge positive for investors. At this juncture, though, that may be too much to expect from 2019.

WASHINGTON POST

• Andy Mukherjee is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering industrial companies and financial services. He previously was a columnist for Reuters Breakingviews. He has also worked for The Straits Times, ET NOW and Bloomberg News.

How a billion Asian voters navigate around misinformation, fake news and a hardening of majority sentiment against minorities (Indonesia's ethnic Chinese and India's Muslims) on their way to the polling booths will be worth watching.

BIG PICTURE



Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 33 deg C Low 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 37 to 53 (Moderate)



PHOTO: XINHUA

Cool way to mark the new year

Chinese tourists braved the freezing cold at the Songhua River in Harbin on Tuesday for a chance to take photos with snowmen sculpted in the park by winter revellers. Around 2,000 snowmen were created.

The Songhua River passes through Harbin, also known as Ice City, and the river's banks have long been a popular gathering place for tourists and families to indulge in ice and snow activities.

For several weeks from December through to January, the north-eastern Chinese city is a hub of activity as a magical illuminated city of ice emerges.

Blocks of ice from the frozen Songhua River are transported by thousands of labourers to the site, then sculpted and built into elaborate and dazzling monuments and buildings. The sculptures include full-sized ice buildings that visitors can walk through and around like a real city.

From Saturday, the city will host the 35th Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival, which will be open until next month.

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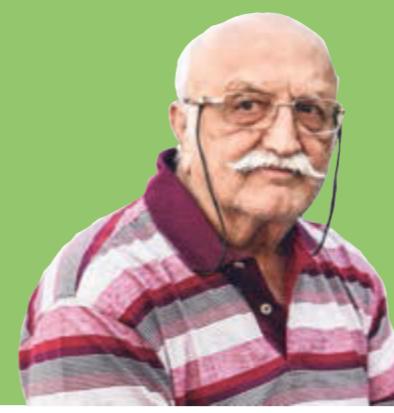
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Horizon Towers seeks to go en bloc again at same \$1.1b price

If tender closes with lower offer, EGM will be called for owners to consider bid

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

Horizon Towers, among the contenders for Singapore's largest collective sale last year, has re-launched for sale by tender for a second time at the same reserve price of \$1.1 billion.

The tender closes on Jan 28 at 3pm.

The 211-unit, 99-year leasehold condominium in the prestigious Leonie Hill area first launched for sale just before the July 6 cooling measures were announced, and the tender closed without a bid on Sept 12.

"We have time for another tender before the collective sale agreement expires in May," said Mr Tan.

Hong Boon, regional director of marketing agent JLL.

"Should there be any offer at the close of tender at a lower price than the reserve price, the collective sale committee may call for an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) for owners to consider the offer. If agreed at the EGM, at least 80 per cent of owners must sign a supplemental agreement to lower the price," he added.

At \$1.1 billion, owners of the 200 apartments could receive between \$4.7 million and \$5.2 million each, while owners of the 11 penthouses could each reap between \$9.2 million and \$10 million.

The reserve price translates to a land rate of about \$1,977 per square foot per plot ratio (psf ppr) after factoring in the lease top-up premium estimated at \$228 million.

"As the site has a high development baseline, currently there is no development charge or differential premium for the intensification of the site even for the 10 per cent bonus gross floor area," said JLL.



Horizon Towers was first launched for sale just before the July 6 cooling measures were announced, but the tender closed without a bid. ST FILE PHOTO

The 1.9ha District 9 site, located near the upcoming Great World MRT station and the Orchard MRT Interchange (Thomson-East Coast Line), is zoned residential in the 2014 Master Plan with an allowable height of up to 36 storeys. It has an

"as-built" gross plot ratio of around 3.28.

"As the site is located within the Central Area, it is not subject to an average unit size of 85 sq m, which allows the developer to build smaller units and keep the quan-

ENOUGH TIME FOR ANOTHER TENDER

We have time for another tender before the collective sale agreement expires in May.

“

MR TAN HONG BOON, regional director of marketing agent JLL.

SMALLER UNITS ALLOWED

As the site is located within the Central Area, it is not subject to an average unit size of 85 sq m, which allows the developer to build smaller units and keep the quantum palatable for potential buyers.

“

JLL, the marketing agent.

tum palatable for potential buyers," JLL added.

Last October, the Urban Redevelopment Authority – in a bid to manage potential strain on infrastructure – revised guidelines to reduce the maximum number of units allowed in new private flats and condominium developments outside the Central Area.

The maximum number per development will be the proposed building gross floor area (GFA) divided by 85 sq m. It is currently GFA divided by 70 sq m. The revised guidelines will apply to new applications for private non-landed residential developments after Jan 17.

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Downtrend for S'pore economy expected to continue this year

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

Singapore's economy last year ended on a low note from October to December, recording the slowest quarter of growth in 2018, as global trade tensions and slowing manufacturing demand eat into the growth of key industries here.

This downward trend is likely to continue into this year, which will be fraught with uncertainties in the global economy, said economists.

Expanding by 2.2 per cent year on year in the fourth quarter, the economy fared slightly worse than the 2.3 per cent growth in the previous quarter, flash estimates by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) yesterday showed.

Overall, the economy grew by 3.3 per cent in the whole of last year, down from 2017's 3.6 per cent.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Tuesday had also cited "major uncertainties" in 2019 due to growing trade conflicts, nervous financial markets and signs of slowing growth. The economy is expected to grow by between 1.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent this year.

On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted annualised basis, the economy expanded at a slower pace of 1.6 per cent in the fourth quarter compared with the 3.5 per cent growth in the previous quarter.

This slowdown, said DBS Bank economist Irvin Seah, occurs across the board with all key sectors affected by external headwinds.

Manufacturing expanded by 5.5 per cent year on year in the fourth quarter, faster than the 3.7 per cent growth in the previous quarter. This growth was largely driven by output expansions in the biomedical manufacturing and electronics clusters, although the precision engineering cluster shrank.

However, the positive results come on the back of a low base for manufacturing in the same period in 2017. The sector actually shrank 8.7 per cent on a quarter-on-quarter basis, the first for manufacturing last year, noted OCBC Bank's head of treasury research and strategy Selena Ling.

This is a sign that the softening



On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted annualised basis, Singapore's economy expanded at a slower pace of 1.6 per cent in the fourth quarter compared with the 3.5 per cent growth in the previous quarter. As the effect of the trade war starts to bite, the resulting slowdown in China's manufacturing could have impacted Singapore's growth too, said DBS Bank economist Irvin Seah. PHOTO: REUTERS

Overall, the economy grew by 3.3 per cent in the whole of last year, down from 2017's 3.6 per cent.

global demand environment is starting to weigh in, she added.

Front-loading activities, a practice in which American and Chinese manufacturers accelerate the orders of production and shipment to avoid potential tariffs due to the ongoing trade war, are also showing signs of fading, said Ms Ling.

As the effect of the trade war starts to bite, the resulting slowdown in China's manufacturing

could have impacted Singapore's growth too, said Mr Seah.

He added that the drag in the manufacturing sector has partly split over to services-producing industries here.

The service sector expanded at a slower pace in the fourth quarter, growing by 1.9 per cent year on year compared with the 2.6 per cent growth in the previous quarter.

"Continued moderation in the

growth momentum in this sector would have significant implications on the performance of the overall economy, as well as employment outlook," Mr Seah said.

The service sector accounts for around 70 per cent of Singapore's economy and employment.

Meanwhile, the construction sector continued its slump, contracting by 2.2 per cent year on year, extending the 2.5 per cent decline in

the previous quarter. The contraction was primarily due to weakness in public sector construction activities.

MTI will release the growth figures for the fourth quarter and the whole of last year, including performance by sectors, sources of growth, inflation, employment and productivity, next month.

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Raffles Medical opens its first China hospital

Chongqing facility has 700 beds; second hospital will launch in Shanghai this year

Raffles Medical Group has opened a 700-bed hospital in Chongqing, its first international tertiary hospital in China.

The group also has medical centres providing outpatient services in seven other Chinese cities, it said in a Singapore Exchange announcement before the market opened yesterday.

The Chongqing hospital, which is owned and operated by the group, has a gross floor area of 100,000 sq m.

When fully opened, it will offer specialist services and centres of ex-



Raffles Medical's Chongqing hospital brings the group's presence to 14 cities across Asia, including eight cities in China.

PHOTO: RAFFLES MEDICAL GROUP

cellence in gastrointestinal surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, cardiovascular surgery, neurosciences and oncology.

It is in the Liangjiang New Area in

Chongqing, and in the same district as Chongqing International Airport.

Management staff from Raffles Hospital Singapore will be sec-

onded to the hospital, and some of the locally hired senior staff and doctors were posted to Singapore for an attachment to familiarise them with how the hospital works.

Raffles Medical said: "Apart from providing quality healthcare to the rising middle- and upper-income population in Chongqing, the hospital aims to meet a currently unmet demand for international quality healthcare service in Chongqing and its surrounding regions."

"Raffles Hospital Chongqing will also be meeting the healthcare needs of the increasing number of foreigners working and setting up their bases in Chongqing for the region."

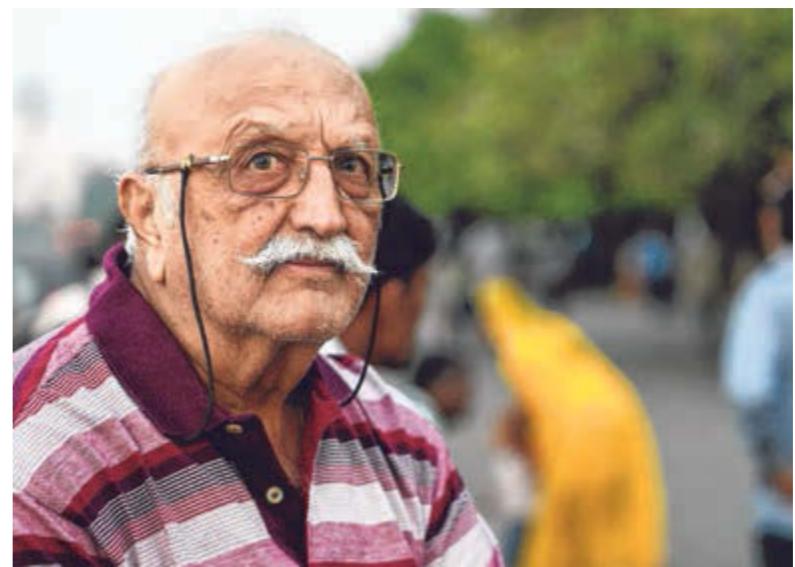
The hospital brings the group's presence to 14 cities across Asia, including eight cities in China.

The group will open a second hospital in Shanghai this year. It will be in Qian'an, Pudong district.

Dr Loo Choon Yong, executive chairman of Raffles Medical Group, said in a statement: "This is an exciting time for us at Raffles, as we have been looking at the healthcare space in China for some time."

"We are committed to bringing the Raffles brand of quality, peer-reviewed healthcare to China through Raffles Hospital Chongqing and, in time to come, Raffles Hospital Shanghai."

The group's flagship is the 380-bed Raffles Hospital in Singapore. Last year, the private hospital added a new 20-storey Specialist Centre, offering 220,000 sq ft of gross floor area.



Mr. Vijaypat Singhania gifted control of the Raymond Group to his son three years ago, but now bitterly regrets his decision. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Indian father and son battle for billion-dollar empire



Mr. Gautam Singhania says a new style of management has made the difference at Raymond.



A housing estate near Green Hills Beach at Cronulla in Sydney. In Sydney, home prices stumbled nearly 9 per cent on the year, while Melbourne saw an annual drop of 7 per cent. Sydney and Melbourne comprise about 60 per cent of Australia's housing market by value and 40 per cent by number. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Australia's home prices mark worst year since 2008

SYDNEY • Australian home prices skidded nearly 5 per cent last year, marking their worst year since 2008, led by tighter credit conditions and waning investor interest, and analysts expect the weakness to persist this year.

Property values across the country fell for the 15th consecutive month in December, with the rate of decline in Sydney and Melbourne - the two largest markets - worsening over the year, according to property consultant CoreLogic.

Its index of home prices nationally dropped 1.8 per cent last month from November, and tum-

bled 2.3 per cent for the quarter - the worst quarterly decline in eight years.

Values in the combined capital cities fell 1.3 per cent in the month and 6.1 per cent for the year. Sydney was the worst-performing capital city with prices down 1.8 per cent last month. Regional centres fared better, with prices outside the cities staying almost flat.

"Access to credit has been the most significant factor weighing down housing market conditions over the year," said Mr Tim Lawless, head of research at CoreLogic.

Since 2015, regulators have

clamped down on risky lending by banks, particularly for interest-only loans, while a raft of scandals amid a high-level government-mandated inquiry has added to an air of caution.

Last year, Australia's prudential regulator did ease some of its lending restrictions, but Mr Lawless said access to finance was likely to remain "the most significant barrier" to an improvement in housing market conditions this year.

"Lenders are understandably risk-averse against a backdrop of falling dwelling values, high household debt, rising supply and height-

ened regulatory focus following the banking royal commission inquiry," he said.

The slowdown has been greatest in Sydney where home prices stumbled nearly 9 per cent on the year, though Melbourne was catching up with an annual drop of 7 per cent.

Sydney and Melbourne comprise about 60 per cent of Australia's housing market by value and 40 per cent by number.

Rental market conditions were also generally subdued, with weekly rents unchanged over the year across combined capital cities. REUTERS

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Tender Closing: 31 Jan 2019 (Thur), 3pm

For more information, please contact:

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Closing: 28 January 2019, (Monday) 3:00pm

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A drilling machine production line at a factory in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province. In China, the Caixin Media and IHS Markit Purchasing Managers' Index fell to 49.7 from 50.2, its lowest reading since May 2017. That confirms a trend seen in the official PMI on Monday, which showed a drop to 49.4 last month, the weakest since early 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

China leads slump in Asian factory activity

Sino-US trade war, fading tech boom blamed for region's falling PMIs

HONG KONG • Factory conditions across some of Asia's most export-oriented economies slumped last month, hit by the US-China trade war and a fading technology boom.

In China, the Caixin Media and IHS Markit Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to 49.7 from 50.2, its lowest reading since May 2017, reports showed yesterday.

That confirms a trend seen in the official PMI on Monday, which showed a drop to 49.4 last month, the weakest since early 2016. A reading below 50 signals contraction.

Asian stocks fell and US futures and oil pared gains.

"The PMIs are signalling trouble ahead," said economist Chua Hak

Bin at Maybank Kim Eng Research in Singapore.

"There have been some healthy trade numbers in some countries, but this is probably short-lived."

Taiwan's Nikkei and IHS Markit manufacturing PMI fell to 47.7 last month from 48.4 in November, down from 56.6 a year earlier.

That is partly due to a fall in demand for machinery and electronics goods, along with information and communications equipment, amid slowing orders for new smartphones and the simmering trade war.

Malaysia's PMI fell to 46.8 from 48.2, its lowest reading since the series began. New orders were at

their weakest since May.

South Korea's PMI remained in contractionary territory for the second consecutive month even as the overall reading nudged higher. The manufacturing nation – a bellwether for global trade – saw exports fall last month.

There were signs of softness across the rest of the region too. Vietnam's PMI fell to 53.8, while the Philippines' PMI fell to 53.2.

In export-reliant Singapore, economic growth slowed to an annualised 1.6 per cent in the final quarter of last year, according to data released yesterday. Indonesia bucked the trend, with its PMI rising to 51.2. The readings show the ongoing

trade war between the United States and China is hurting demand across Asia's manufacturing hubs.

While US President Donald Trump has signalled that negotiations with China are making progress, economists remain wary that the talks could stall ahead of a March 1 deadline.

Bloomberg's Global Trade Checkup is softening amid a fading rush to front-load export orders ahead of threatened tariffs, with economists warning 2019 will be the year the global economy feels the strain of trade tensions.

The picture in Asia matches an emerging trend in the US, where five Federal Reserve indexes of regional manufacturing all slumped last month, the first time they have fallen in unison since May 2016.

Worsening data could prompt Mr Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping to agree on trade, Hong Kong-based chief Asia economist Xia Le at Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria told Bloomberg Television. "In China, they are facing a slowdown and according to recent data, this slowdown is worse than expected," he said. BLOOMBERG

US curbs on China deals hit Bill Gates' nuclear venture

NEW YORK • TerraPower, a nuclear energy venture chaired by Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, is seeking a new partner for early-stage trials of its technology, after new US rules forced it to abandon an agreement with China, company officials told The Wall Street Journal.

TerraPower reached an agreement with state-owned China National Nuclear Corp in 2017 to build an experimental nuclear reactor south of Beijing.

But Mr Gates wrote in an essay published late last week that TerraPower is unlikely to follow through on its plans in the face of new United States restrictions on technology deals with China.

The Washington-based company is now unsure which country it will work with to conduct trials of its technology, which is designed to use depleted uranium as fuel for nuclear reactors in a bid to im-

prove safety and costs, company officials told the Journal.

"We are regrouping," chief executive Chris Levesque told the Journal in an interview. "Maybe we can find another partner."

The US Department of Energy announced last October new restrictions on nuclear deals with China, in keeping with a broader plan by the Trump administration to limit China's ability to access US-made technologies it considers to be of strategic importance.

Mr Gates, who co-founded TerraPower, said in his essay that regulations in the United States are currently too restrictive to allow the reactor prototype to be built domestically. REUTER

NEW DIRECTION

We are regrouping. Maybe we can find another partner.

“

CHIEF EXECUTIVE CHRIS LEVESQUE, on TerraPower's plan after new US rules forced it to abandon a nuclear deal with China. REUTERS

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Issuance date ¹	01 February 2019
Maturity date ¹	01 February 2029
Maximum amount offered ²	\$300,000,000
Issue Code	GX19020V
Coupon payment dates ¹	01 August and 01 February
Minimum application	\$500
Individual limit across all issues	\$100,000

You may apply for this issue from 6.00pm, 2 January 2019 till 9.00pm, 28 January 2019 at DBS/POSB, OCBC and UOB ATMs and Internet Banking, and OCBC's mobile application. These channels will be open between 7.00am and 9.00pm from Mondays to Saturdays, excluding Public Holidays.

Year*	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Coupon, %	1.98	1.98	1.98	2.09	2.16	2.21	2.30	2.38	2.46	2.53
Average annual return, %**	1.98	1.98	1.98	2.01	2.04	2.06	2.10	2.13	2.16	2.20

*From issue date **At the end of each year, on a compounded basis

This bond will be reflected as "SBFEB19 GX19020V" in your CDP statement. Interest and principal payments from this bond will show up in your bank statement as "CDP-SBFEB19". Interest income on Savings Bonds is exempt from tax, and Savings Bonds may not be sold, transferred or pledged without MAS' prior approval. Holders of existing Savings Bonds may submit redemption requests by 9.00pm, 28 January 2019. The bonds will be redeemed on 01 February 2019.

This document is for informational purposes only and does not constitute the terms of issue for this Savings Bond. By subscribing to this Savings Bond, you shall be deemed to have understood, accepted, and be bound by, the terms of issue for the Savings Bonds on the date of issuance of the Savings Bond to you. For the complete terms of issue, please refer to the public notice dated 2 January 2019 at the following link: <http://www.sgs.gov.sg/savingsbonds/Resources/Announcements.aspx>.

¹If MAS' electronic payment system is not in operation on this date, then issuance, interest payment or redemption, as the case may be, will occur on the next day when the electronic payment system is in operation.

²If total applications exceed this amount, MAS will distribute the total amount on offer as evenly as possible, and some individuals may not receive the full amount they applied for.

Gold hits 6-month high on falling dollar, equities

BENGALURU • Gold scaled a more than six-month peak yesterday as the dollar fell along with Asian equities after disappointing data from China cemented fears of a slowdown in global economic growth.

Spot gold was up 0.4 per cent at US\$1,287.31 an ounce by 1113 GMT, having earlier touched its highest since June 15 at US\$1,288.66.

US gold futures rose 0.5 per cent to US\$1,287.80 per ounce.

"It looks very optimistic and fundamentally supportive for gold as the overall mood is still very uncertain and the market confidence is still weak on global growth worries," said commodities analyst Benjamin Li Jiaxuan at Phillip Futures.

The dollar index, which tracks the greenback against a basket of major currencies, was hovering near a two-month low hit in the previous session. A softer dollar makes the greenback-denominated bullion cheaper for investors holding other currencies.

Also, Asian shares turned tail on the first trading day of the new year as more disappointing economic data from China, the world's second-largest economy, darkened the mood and erased early gains in US stock futures.

"The global economy has entered into an uncharted territory considering the fact that the Chinese data was worse than expected," said Mr Kunal Shah, head of research at Nirmal Bang Commodities in Mumbai.

"With uncertainties on global economy and geopolitical concerns, it's just a matter of time gold is going to shoot up."

Markets were looking for views from Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell on the US economic outlook and hints about rate hikes this year when he participates in a joint discussion with former Fed chairmen Janet Yellen and Ben Bernanke tomorrow.

There are expectations that a three-year rate-hiking cycle in the United States has come to a close. Markets currently expect no rate hikes next year.

A half in interest rate increases would be beneficial for non-interest bearing bullion.

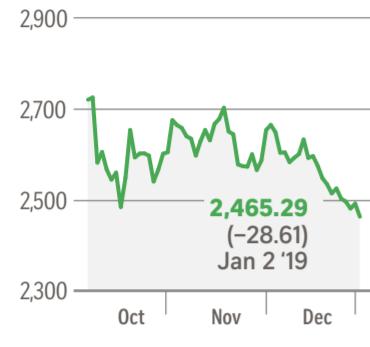
Among other precious metals, palladium lost 0.77 per cent to US\$1,254.30 per ounce. Silver was down 0.13 per cent at US\$15.42 an ounce, while platinum was flat at US\$791.40 per ounce.

REUTERS

Hang Seng



Shanghai Comp



Nikkei 225



Dow Jones



BullsAndBears

Asian markets hit by weak China factory data

STI down 1% as lower-than-expected Q4 GDP estimates here signal slowdown

Navin Sregantan

Investors hoping that the fairly positive end to last year's final trading day would continue into the new year had their hopes crushed, with Asian benchmarks ending in the red yesterday.

They are blaming it on the disappointing reading of China's Purchasing Managers' Index - or Caixin PMI - last month, as the lacklustre factory data suggests slowing growth in the global economy.

The December contraction is the first in 19 months reported by the private survey on manufacturing in the world's second-biggest economy.

IG market analyst Pan Jingyi told The Business Times: "We have seen the new orders component within the Caixin PMI declining, reflecting the poor demand conditions that had likely been a result of various growth stressors, including the US-China trade item."

"With the worries manifesting in economic indicators' showings, it is of little wonder we are seeing the market reaction today."

This weighed heavily on key Asian indexes, with the Hang Seng, Shanghai Composite Index, ASX 200, Kospo and Kuala Lumpur Composite Index all ending lower.

The Hong Kong market bore the brunt, with the benchmark index

Straits Times Index

FTSE ST Catalyst Index

FTSE ST All-Share Index

falling 3 per cent in early trading before closing 715.35 points, or 2.8 per cent, lower at 25,130.35.

Japanese markets are closed until tomorrow.

Negative sentiments also dented the US dollar as demand for safer in-

vestments sent gold prices to the highest since June 18 last year.

It traded at US\$1,287.20 per ounce at 6.51pm yesterday.

Phillip Futures commodities analyst Benjamin Lu told Reuters: "It looks very optimistic and funda-

mentally supportive for gold as the overall mood is still very uncertain."

Singapore's Straits Times Index (STI) closed 29.87 points, or 0.9 per cent, lower at 3,038.89 as the miss in the fourth-quarter gross domestic product flash estimates pointed to a slowdown in global growth.

CMC Markets analyst Margaret Yang said: "Lower-than-expected fourth-quarter readings suggest Singapore's economy is moderating at a pace faster than the market had anticipated."

She noted that the markets have already reacted to the global slowdown, adding: "The question is how much more of a downside there is before we see a bottoming out."

Of the 30 STI constituents, 20 counters ended in the red. Turnover stood at about 1.46 billion shares worth \$763 million.

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Yidai shuts as China reins in peer-to-peer lenders

MUMBAI • Yidai, an online peer-to-peer (P2P) lending intermediary, is the latest to exit the business as China reins in its US\$176 billion (S\$240 billion) experiment with this riskier form of financing.

The company set up a committee to start refunding its lenders after "months" of losses, Yidai said in statements over the extended holiday weekend.

It has about 32,000 lenders with an outstanding principal balance of four billion yuan (S\$796 million), and expects to repay them in three to five years.

Yidai, which received investment from SoftBank China Venture Capital in 2014, also said shareholders and executives are not allowed to leave the country.

Chinese leaders are dramatically shrinking a market that spawned the nation's biggest Ponzi scheme, protests in major cities, and life-altering losses for thousands of savers.

The authorities are planning to wind down small and medium-sized P2P lending platforms nationwide, people with knowledge of the matter had earlier said.

The move is in line with President Xi Jinping's broader crackdown on shadow banking.

In China, P2P platforms comprise one of the riskiest and least regulated slices of the system. The lack of oversight allowed for world-beating growth, with outstanding P2P loans ballooning from almost nothing in 2012 to 1.22 trillion yuan in December 2017.

BLOOMBERG

Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS %	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	255	-2	8019	6.3	12
205	161	CapitaCom Trust	176	+1	5950	4.9	12
388	293	CapitaLand	307	-4	3966	3.9	0.7
232	195	CapitaLand Trust	237	+1	5709	4.9	11
1360	1251	CityDev	801	-11	1146	22	0.7
251	196	ComfortDelGro	214	-1	5247	4.9	13
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2349	-20	2737	6.1	13
968	767	DairyFarm USD	US905	unch	726	2.3	-
141	855	Genting Sing	97	-0.5	29471	3.6	15
39	225	Golden Agri-Res.	455	-1	9086	3.3	0.6
42	42	Huay Tung USD	US700	-0.5	522	1.1	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US634	+4	1167	3.2	0.7
6958	5580	JMH USD	US6758	-200	119	2.4	0.9
4149	3155	JSJ USD	US3690	+19	86	0.9	0.4
4142	2766	Jardine C&C	3476	-59	196	3.3	17
892	567	Kellog Corp	586	-5	2882	3.8	0.9
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1110	-16	3898	3.3	12
585	455	SATS	465	-1	116	3.9	32
550	527	SOGO	701	-2	210	4.2	81
1184	914	SIA	938	-4	589	4.3	0.8
292	232	SPH	233	-2	3537	5.6	11
370	319	ST Engineering	350	+1	2344	4.3	51
360	243	Sembcorp Ind	251	-3	1687	2	0.7
365	286	Singtel	288	-5	26096	7.1	13
945	575	SMRT	1205	-0.5	1209	1	3
3037	2380	StarHub	252	-26	1641	4.1	12
938	591	UOB	607	-12	1015	2.9	0.5
2965	1348	Venture Corp	1376	-19	724	4.4	18
331	297	Wilmar Int'l	313	+1	3237	3.2	0.9
166	84	YTL Shipbldg SGD	125	unch	25883	3.6	0.9

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS %	P/BV
286	245	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	145	129	304	7.7	1
205	161	Accordia Golf Tr	71	48	50.5	7.6	0.6
388	293	Ascendas-Htrust	90.5	74	947	-	0.8
232	195	Ascendas-ITrust	108	unch	1759	5.6	1.3
1360	1251	Asian Pay TV Tr	13	+0.3	3069	50	0.2
251	196	Banyan Tree	58	+0.5	255	17	0.8
3128	2265	Best World	273	+10	2969	15	9.8
968	767	Boustead	79.5	-0.5	50	3.8	12
78	59	BreadTalk	81.5	-0.5	93	8.6	2.2
197	150	Bukit Semawang	567	+2	76	32	1.2
236	211	Cache Log Trust	70	+0.5	755	10.4	1
4142	2766	Centurion	41	-0.5	29	6.1	0.7
892	567	China Aviation	105	-1	533	4.3	0.9
42	42	China Everbright	30.5	+0.5	202	16	0.6
744	588	China Sunshine	125	-1	793	24	1.3
6958	5580	Chip Eng Seng	64.5	-15	1256	6.2	0.5
4149	3155	Cosco	33	unch	7708	-	14
328	265	Delong	627	-4	2	-	0.6
78	59	Duty Free Int'l	19.5	-0.1	36	9.5	12
197	150	EC World Reit	69.5	+0.5	146	8.7	0.8
236	211	ESR-REIT	51	unch	1146	7.5	0.9
119	101	First Reit	98	-0.5	199	8.7	0.9
141	855	Frasers Com Tr	137	unch	541	7	0.9
39	225	Frasers HTrust	70	unch	436	-	0.9
234	167	Geo Energy Res	91	+0.3	718	5.8	1
42	23	HRnet Group	79	-1	57	2.9	2.4
744	588	Health Mgt Int'l	55	+1	37	0.6	5.3
6958	5580	Hi-Pintl	88	-0.5	3864	28.4	13
4149	3155	Hong Leong Fin	283	252	88	5.1	0.6
232	195	I-REIT Global	82.5	71	66	8.2	1
1360	1251	Indofood Agri	18.4	18.3	36	-	0.2
251	1						

Temasek's Fullerton unit puts together private equity team

Addition meant to complement firm's existing range of strategies and solutions for clients

Temasek unit Fullerton Fund Management is building up a new private equity team, which will take the Asia-based investment specialist's capabilities beyond its existing focus on equities, fixed income, multiassets and alternatives.

Last month, Mr Tan Huck Khim, formerly with Credit Suisse's customised fund investment group as a

partner on the global investment committee, joined as head of private equity.

He is responsible for driving the firm's private equity strategies, managing its private equity portfolios and developing investment solutions for clients.

Next Monday, Mr Kenneth Chia will join as vice-president of the private equity team from his previous job at AIA Investment Management, where he was senior manager in the external manager strategies and alternative investments team.

The company said the addition of

a private equity team is meant to complement its existing range of strategies and solutions for clients.

It added: "We are looking to build this business methodically in phases and the hires represent the first stage of constructing a meaningful private equity business."

Fullerton chief investment officer Patrick Yeo said yesterday that adding a private equity team "ensures the firm can extend its comprehensive range of investment solutions to address our clients' long-term needs".

He added: "Fullerton is aware of the need to ensure our investment

capabilities remain competitive and Huck Khim's appointment represents a significant enhancement of our investment proposition.

"Our dedicated private equity capability effectively complements our existing suite of investment strategies."

Fullerton also announced the appointment of Mr Mark Yuen as its new chief business development officer. He will join next Tuesday.

Mr Yuen was formerly director and head of institutional sales and client management at Eastspring Investments, the Asian asset management business of Prudential. He also worked previously at Robeco Hong Kong, Credit Agricole Asset Management and the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

He will lead efforts to widen Fullerton's target markets and client segments, and expand the development and distribution of investment solutions.

He will report to Fullerton chief executive Jenny Sofian.

Ms Sofian said: "It is an opportune moment for us to make these senior appointments, as we accelerate to bring the business to the next level."

"Huck Khim and Mark are high-calibre individuals with substantial industry experience."

CompanyBriefs

Formal Law Alliance Withers KhattarWong

Formal Law Alliance (FLA) Withers KhattarWong has become a fully integrated practice and operates as a single entity, rather than as two separate firms practising under the banner of an alliance.

Partners of FLA Withers KhattarWong yesterday announced the beginning of their combined law firm - legally named Withers KhattarWong LLP.

Withers Worldwide and Singapore law practice KhattarWong had forged an FLA in 2015. After three years of collaboration, the two firms decided to take their relationship a step further - in the form of a fully integrated entity.

Senior Counsel Deborah Barker, managing partner of Withers KhattarWong, said they believe it would be better if they practise as one entity rather than as two separate firms, eliminating any duplication in resources at the same time. After the integration, Withers Singapore will be closed down.

Withers KhattarWong is the largest international law firm focused on private capital in Singapore, with over 90 lawyers qualified in various jurisdictions including Singapore, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Indonesia, Malaysia and Ukraine.

Pan Ocean

Singapore-listed dry bulk carrier Pan Ocean said the sales amount for its shipping contract with Brazilian mining giant Vale International will drop to about US\$45 billion (\$S61 billion) from US\$58 billion due to bunker fuel oil prices.

The company provided that estimate as it announced that both firms have consented to change previously agreed long-term consecutive voyage contracts dated Sept 21, 2009, to contracts of affreightment, the South Korean company said in an exchange filing yesterday.

These contracts are for the transportation of about 238.4 million tonnes of iron ore from Brazil to China over roughly 19 years.

The change was made at the request of Vale, and the existing terms and conditions regarding freight, cargo quantity, and the other contractual terms remain the same with no material impact to Pan Ocean's revenue.

The revised contracts were issued on Monday.



A Didi Chuxing ride-hailing stand in Beijing. The firm's new financial products bring it into competition with Alibaba Group and Tencent.
PHOTO: REUTERS

China's Didi launches credit, crowdfunding services

BEIJING - China's Didi Chuxing has launched a suite of financial products, including crowdfunding and lending, as it continues to diversify outside the ride-hailing business following a year of safety scandals.

The move comes on the heels of a company-wide reorganisation announced last month, aimed at improving safety on its platform as well as operating efficiency.

The new products were tested in 10 cities and have now been introduced nationwide, the firm said yesterday. They include wealth management, credit and lending, and crowdfunding for critical illnesses, all aimed at short-term, temporary workers.

The products bring Didi into com-

Didi itself is facing new rules and increased scrutiny from the authorities after a series of high-profile safety incidents.

petition with Alibaba Group and technology peer Tencent.

They also come as rivals, including other Alibaba-backed firms, have been making a renewed push in a ride-hailing market dominated by Didi, aiming to tap unmet demand brought about by regulatory

change. Didi itself is facing new rules and increased scrutiny from the authorities after a series of high-profile safety incidents, including the murders of two female Didi passengers in separate cases.

As part of a subsequent national audit of ride-hailing firms, the Ministry of Transport said Didi was "out of control" and pledged to tighten driver recruitment standards.

The firm is short of drivers in major cities, since rules in 2017 curbed the number of eligible applicants.

Didi, whose backers include Uber, Apple and SoftBank, is reshuffling its domestic business as it expands globally, with new services in South America and Australia. REUTERS

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Interbank currency rates

Currencies	Jan 2			
	Against \$ Bid	Against \$ Offer	Against US\$ Bid	Against US\$ Offer
\$/US\$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9569	0.9575	0.7019	0.7021
Canadian dollar	1.0024	1.0030	0.7355	0.7352
Euro	1.5625	1.5636	1.1461	1.1465
NZ dollar	0.9138	0.9146	0.6703	0.6706
Sterling pound	1.7374	1.7386	1.2744	1.2748
US dollar	1.3633	1.3638	-	-
\$/US\$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	19.8900	19.8987	14.5896	14.5907
Danish kroner	20.9278	20.9387	15.3508	15.3532
Hong Kong dollar	17.40	17.41	12.7616	12.7623
Indian Rupee	195	195	14292	14294
Indonesian rupiah	0.0094	0.0094	0.0069	0.0069
Japanese yen	12487	12494	0.9159	0.9161
Korean won	0.1216	0.1218	0.0892	0.0893
Malaysian ringgit	3293	3297	241546	241779
New Taiwan dollar	44254	44314	32461	32493
Norwegian kroner	15.7412	15.7579	115464	115544
Philippine peso	25955	25975	19039	19046
Saudi riyal	36.3401	36.3573	26.6560	26.6588
Swedish krona	15.3147	15.3255	11.2336	11.2373
Swiss franc	138.9280	139.0356	101.9056	101.9472
Thai Baht	4.2181	4.2236	3.0941	3.0969

MSCI INDICES

Jan 1	In local curr %dy %yr Index Change Change		
World Preliminary	1441.4	0.0	0.0
EAFFE Preliminary	1007.9	0.0	0.0
Europe Preliminary	1404.5	0.0	0.0
Australia	114.1	0.0	0.0
Austria Preliminary	498.1	0.0	0.0
Belgium Preliminary	914.9	0.0	0.0
Canada Preliminary	1830.9	0.0	0.0
Denmark Preliminary	7406.9	0.0	0.0
Finland Preliminary	653.1	0.0	0.0
France Preliminary	1713.5	0.0	0.0
Germany Preliminary	843.7	0.0	0.0
Greece Preliminary	43.4	0.0	0.0
India	1266.3	0.3	0.3
Indonesia	707.47	0.0	0.0
Ireland Preliminary	179.2	0.0	0.0
Israel Preliminary	231.9	0.5	0.5
Italy Preliminary	622.1	0.0	0.0
Japan	893.2	0.0	0.0
Korea	604.1	0.0	0.0
Malaysia	581.7	0.0	0.0
Netherlands Preliminary	1458.0	0.0	0.0
New Zealand	132.7	0.0	0.0
Norway Preliminary	2784.9	0.0	0.0
Pakistan	367.0	2.8	2.8
Philippines	1262.2	0.0	0.0
Portugal Preliminary	80.8	0.0	0.0
Singapore	1594.4	0.0	0.0
Singapore Free	342.8	0.0	0.0

Source: MSCI
Source: OBC

Government securities

Period	Issue code	Coupon rate (%)	Maturity	Close Bid	Jan 2	
					High	Low
2-Year	NY05100N	3.250%	01-Sep-20	102.24	0.00	0.00
5-Year	NX13100H	2.750%	01-Jul-23	103.63	103.65	103.65
10-Year	NX18100A	2.625%	01-May-28	104.9	105.05	104.98
15-Year	NZ13100V	3.375%	01-Sep-33	113.66	114.08	113.70
20-Year	NZ16					

OBITUARIES

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1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192



林峴祥

VICTOR LIM KAI SIONG

Age: 55

passed away peacefully on 26 December 2018.

Dear miss and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Linda Kuo

Son:

Lim Bo Wen

Daughter:

Lim Yi Shan

Brothers:

Ricky Lim Kai Ling

Sisters-in-law:

Liu Ju Ying

Lim Kai Shan

Brother-in-law:

Jenny Teo

Sister:

Vivian Lim Kai Zhi

And all relatives & friends.

Body is resting at No. 10 Ubi Road 4

(Teochew Funeral Parlour Hall 1) Singapore 408609.

Cortege will leave on 5 January 2019 (Saturday) at 10am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 11am.

Mary Moses

Age: 97

Was called to be with the Lord on 1 January 2019.

"The souls of the just are in the hand of God."

The Book of Wisdom



Wife of the late Moses Joseph, Mother to John (deceased), Margaret and Christopher Joseph, son-in-law Ben Cunico and Grandma to Adam and Kane. She leaves behind sister-in-law Maggie Anthony, loving nieces and nephews, best friend Yani and new-found 'Angel' Beth.

The family thanks Dr Sitoi for her long health and wellness and Dr Lau for her comfort in her final days. Funeral Mass on Friday 4 January 2019 at 4.00pm at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 50 Ophir Road, Singapore 188690, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 5.45pm.

May she rest in eternal peace in the arms of the angels and with loved ones who have gone before her.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

Psalms 19:7



LEONG CHEE TIEK

Age: 60

was called home to be with the Lord on 2 January 2019.

Dearly missed by loved ones.

Beloved Wife: Evelyn Leong
Father: Leong Mun Fye (Deceased)
Mother: Yong Sow Yoong
Son: Samuel Leong
Daughter-in-law: Evon Goh
Granddaughter: Elena Leong

Wake is held at Blk 156 Bishan St 13 Singapore 570156.

Night services on 3 & 4 January 2019 (Thursday & Friday) at 8pm.

Cortege leaves on 5 January 2019 (Saturday) at 12.25pm for cremation at Mandai Crematorium Hall 1.

10th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



**KANDASAMY
NARAYANASAMY
THEVAR**

Departed on 3 January 2009
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In Loving Memory of



**ANGELINE
NG KIANG JOO**

Departed 3.1.85
Sadly missed by Lena, Andy, Lucy & Lim Yen Yen

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Anbe Sivam
Ramalingam
s/o Kuppusamy
Maniam

Age: 74

Was called home to be with God, surrounded by his loved ones on 2 January 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by:



Wife: Venbagavalli d/o Muthusamy Subramaniam

Daughters & Son-in-law:
Kannmani Ramalingam & R. Sivaguru
Deepa Ramalingam

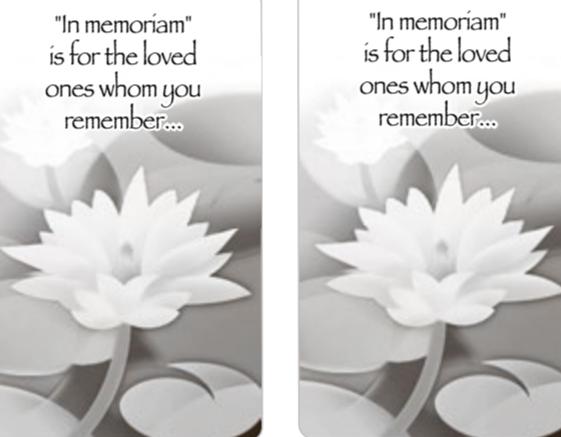
Beloved Vairen

Caregiver Thein

And all relatives and friends

Appa is resting at Block 105 Woodlands Street 13, #13-184, Singapore 730105. Tel: 9450 3887 / 9380 3214

Cortege leaves on Thursday 3 January 2019 at 5.00pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 6.30pm.



The family of the late



NG YOK LAY

Departed on 29 December 2018

Wish to express their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to relatives, friends, colleagues and business associates for their kind assistance, attendance, condolences, donations and wreaths during their recent bereavement.

Obituaries

For enquiries,
call

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(weekdays 8.30am to 6.30pm)

6319-5192

St Classifieds

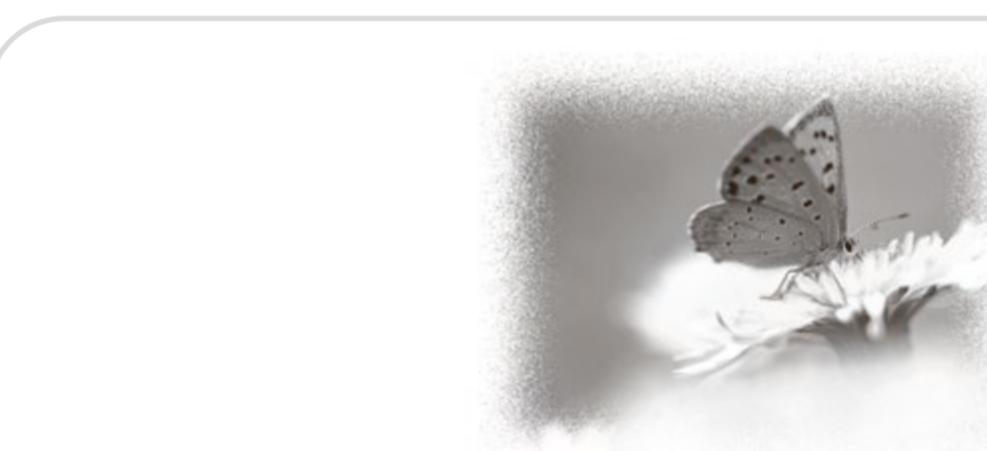
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Sir Winston Churchill

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SOLID IN DEFENCE, CLINICAL IN ATTACK

Guardiola must get Man City to execute game plan to perfection, Silva and Fernandinho will be key

Richard Jolly

The Champions League final is on June 1. The English Premier League final, if Pep Guardiola is right, is on Jan 3. The Manchester City manager has claimed the title race is "over and finished" if his side drop points tonight.

Perhaps it is realism, perhaps rhetoric. As Guardiola seeks to exact revenge on the side who ended City's unbeaten start last season by securing a role reversal, his strategy will revolve around the tactical.

First, however, he has concentrated on the psychological.

The Catalan has called Liverpool

the best team in Europe. It could be a genuine belief, because after Liverpool lost 5-0 at the Etihad Stadium last season, they beat City three times.

Maybe he is hoping Jürgen Klopp will be susceptible to death by flattery. Maybe Unai Emery thought the same when he said Liverpool could be "Invincibles", and his Arsenal lost 5-1 at Anfield.

Yet the more significant game plan will come on the pitch.

Klopp's blueprint against Guardiola has been clear, with pressing high up the pitch and quick breaks to catch the City manager's teams on the counter-attack. But, as Liverpool do not need to win, Klopp may defend deeper than usual, as he did in April's Champions League quarter-final, second-leg tie.

So the onus lies with Guardiola to disrupt a rearguard so resilient it has been breached only eight times this term.

It may include tinkering with his team with a surprise selection although, as he said before victory at Southampton ended a losing run, his answer to adversity is working harder and executing better.

The principles stay the same. Guardiola's are based around dominance of the ball and, with or without Kevin de Bruyne, midfield is the one department where City definitely boast the superior personnel.

City will have more of the ball but, as their three losses to Liverpool last season came with 64, 66 and 68 per cent of possession respectively, that guarantees nothing.

So there are a couple of key elements as to how they use the ball, and they both revolve around the same man: can David Silva thread passes through the Liverpool defence? Can Silva emerge unchained in the box to meet the cutbacks from the wingers?

Then City, who have been profli-

gate of late, must be clinical: they have had 37 shots in their last three meetings with Liverpool and scored just one.

The other half of the job falls to Fernandinho, another who started neither the Crystal Palace nor Leicester defeats, to halt Liverpool's counter-attacks, whether by fair or foul means.

Yet as City conceded more goals in December than Liverpool have all season, it still requires better defending when the back four are called upon. City's shortcomings have been exposed in the last month. Now they must find Liverpool's to defend their crown.

stsports@sph.com.sg

SEE ALSO C9

MAN CITY V LIVERPOOL
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 4am

CITY'S TITLE EVEN IF LIVERPOOL WIN 5-0

Even if Liverpool were to beat Manchester City 5-0, I would still have Guardiola's men down as my title favourites. I know Klopp doesn't believe Liverpool's lack of title-winning experience counts against them but I'm not so sure. City know how to close out a season and they're capable of doing it.

“

STAN COLLYMORE, former Liverpool striker, on why he tips Manchester City to retain their title.

SHOCK IF CITY BEAT REDS

This might sound silly, but I would be shocked if City won this game. They look all over the place at the back. I just can't see how they can stop Liverpool from scoring goals. As the game goes on, I just don't see how Liverpool don't go on to win it.

“

PAUL MERSON, former Arsenal midfielder, on why he can't see City beating leaders Liverpool.

CONFIDENT IT'S LIVERPOOL'S TITLE

City has all the ingredients and experience to overtake Liverpool. But, at this time, I think if Liverpool win that game, I don't see anyone catching them. They're so good and they're doing it with a lot of confidence. I think that's key.

“

MARIO MELCHIOT, former Chelsea defender, tipping Liverpool to win their first league title since 1990.

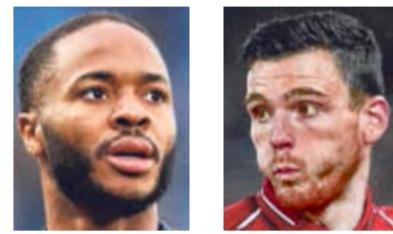
Match points: Manchester City v Liverpool



Key battles

Sergio Aguero v Virgil van Dijk

Aguero looked to have rediscovered his sharpness when he scored at Southampton. While Pep Guardiola sometimes benches him for bigger games, his record at the Etihad, 16 goals in 14 league matches last year, ought to count in his favour. Van Dijk was majestic in subduing Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang. He is looking to make it a double this week.



Raheem Sterling v Andrew Robertson

Sterling has not scored in nine games against Liverpool since leaving Anfield, but was excellent against Southampton. He will probably move back to the right to incorporate Leroy Sane, pitting the Englishman against Robertson, who was superb at the Etihad last season and drew admiring comments from Jose Mourinho last month.



Oleksandr Zinchenko v Mohamed Salah

With Benjamin Mendy injured and Fabian Delph suspended, the third-choice left-back Zinchenko will start, unless Guardiola plays Aymeric Laporte out of position. The Ukrainian was at fault for Southampton's goal on Sunday and Jürgen Klopp might be tempted to shift Salah to the right to try and expose a converted winger's defensive deficiencies.



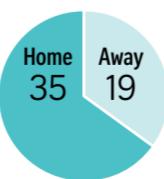
Guardiola's Klopp hoodoo

	Wins	Draws	Losses
Overall	5	2	8
Germany	4	–	4
England	1	2	2
Europe (Man City)	–	–	2

Pep Guardiola has lost more games against Jürgen Klopp than against other managers.

Key statistics

Goal machine v best defence



Percentage of home Premier League goals scored by City this season. They had 61 home goals last term, 58 per cent of their 106 total.



Away goals conceded by Liverpool this season, the lowest in the league ahead of City (7).

Troubled backline



Games since City kept a clean sheet in all competitions, conceding 15 during a run of five wins, two draws and three losses.

Points taken



More points Liverpool took than City in December.



Points both teams took in 2018, the most in English football.

BigMatch

LEAGUE IS NOT WON IN JANUARY: KLOPP

Liverpool boss says title race won't end after City game, Aguero eyes streak against Reds

LONDON • Jurgen Klopp believes that the English Premier League title race is not over for Manchester City yet even if his Liverpool side beat the champions today.

Ahead of today's clash at the Etihad Stadium, Liverpool are top of the league on 54 points from 20 unbeaten games, seven points ahead of City (47) while second-placed Tottenham have 48.

"If we were 10 points behind, would I say we can't catch them? Of course not. It's (only) Jan 3. It's a motivation for them 100 per cent and we need to be ready," the Reds manager said.

The German arrived at his pre-match press conference at the club's Melwood training ground yesterday in a jovial mood, saying to reporters: "Happy New Year to all of you! So far nothing to moan about."

He was upset, however, with how Liverpool are considered favourites for today's clash and talk of them being champions when the season has only passed the halfway stage.

"People say we go there most likely to win... It's not true. It's not reality," he said. "When I pass people on the streets, it's still normal life. Do they like how the boys are playing? For sure. But it's a lack of respect to think our fans are celebrating already."

"It will be a very difficult game. City are a really strong football team with an outstanding manager. We have to be brave and full of desire. They are the best team in the world, that is my opinion."

"The points change, but the preparations don't."

His opposite number Pep Guardiola tried to rally his men, saying that "nobody" thinks City are going to win the showdown.

He said yesterday: "It is Liverpool, with (Manchester) United the best team in England in history. But we can beat them. I know today nobody trusts us, nobody makes one coin for us, but it is what it is."

"They are in the moment the best team in Europe, in the consistency, the way they control the details in their game."

"The reality is clear, we are seven points down... (but) a lot of points to play for. Everybody is asking me what will happen if you lose."

"I have a feeling there is a big opportunity for us to reduce the gap."

His men will have to breach a backline that has conceded just eight goals, with the addition of Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson Becker and a first full season with the world's most expensive defender Virgil van Dijk.

After a slow start, the front three of Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane are also beginning to hit top form, scoring in the same league game for the first time this season last Saturday in the 5-1 home win over Arsenal.

"Results and performances give confidence. We have results and performances. Our boys have quality. As long as we mix up potential with attitude, there will be quality," Klopp added of his side, who have won nine straight league games.

City, on the other hand, have been on a poor run of late, losing three of their past five league games including two in a row against Crystal Palace and Leicester City.

They looked to have turned things around with a 3-1 win over Southampton, but Liverpool will be a completely different test.

The champions have found it difficult against the Reds, winning just four of the 16 meetings between the two since the Manchester club won

the Premier League in 2012.

They are also currently on a four-game winless run in all competitions against Liverpool, with the 0-0 draw at Anfield in October ending a run of three straight defeats.

Guardiola will hope that Sergio Aguero can continue his excellent streak against Liverpool, scoring in all six of his last home league games against the Reds.

After a slow start, the front three of Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane are also beginning to hit top form, scoring in the same league game for the first time this season last Saturday in the 5-1 home win over Arsenal.

"The striker said on the City website: "Of course, I want to score as much as I can to help the team win and, if that's the way it panned out against Liverpool so far, then I hope I can keep the streak going."

"December didn't pan out the way we wanted it to and now we've got more ground to make up."

"Our focus should be on our own game. We are confident in our playing style and we believe it's the most effective to lead us to victory."

Guardiola agreed that it is all about how they can bring out the best in their game.

The Spaniard said: "Our focus is the same. We are going to try to make our game, to be there and be fighting for the Premier League for as far as possible."



CITY ARE THE BEST

It will be a very difficult game. City are a really strong football team with an outstanding manager. We have to be brave and full of desire. They are the best team in the world, that is my opinion.

“

JURGEN KLOPP, Liverpool manager, weighing up the reigning champions Manchester City.

CHANCE TO SHOW WE ARE THE BEST

I have a feeling there is a big opportunity for us to reduce the gap. Our focus is the same. We are going to try to make our game, to be there and be fighting for the Premier League for as far as possible.

“

PEP GUARDiola, Manchester City manager, smelling blood against the league leaders.

Liverpool's Xherdan Shaqiri (right) celebrating his second goal with Roberto Firmino and Georginio Wijnaldum in the 3-1 Premier League home win over Manchester United on Dec 16. PHOTO: REUTERS



Cardiff City goalkeeper Neil Etheridge is beaten just three minutes into their Premier League home match against Tottenham. Striker Harry Kane got lucky when a clearance hit his leg and rebounded into goal. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

'Massive' victory gives Pochettino renewed belief

LONDON • One feature of Mauricio Pochettino's reign is that his Tottenham side are never more dangerous than when they look like they are having fun.

They can grind out the tough results, they can play with the knife between their teeth, but the best Tottenham performances have a freewheeling quality about them, a collaborative joy, the whoosh that

comes with the release of the pressure valve.

The Spurs manager admitted it was vital for his team to start the new year with a bang and record a "massive" victory at Cardiff that reignited their hopes of staying in the Premier League title race.

A convincing 3-0 win on Tuesday lifted Spurs to second and narrowed the gap between them and

Liverpool (54 points) to six points, before the leaders clash with champions Manchester City (47) today.

Goals from Harry Kane, Christian Eriksen and Son Heung-min in just 26 minutes sealed a return to winning ways after a shock 3-1 home defeat by Wolves last Saturday.

"The Premier League is so tough. If you want to be in a good position, you must be consistent for the

whole season and you can't afford to lose the three points like we did against Wolves," Pochettino said.

"I think it was a massive victory, a massive three points to make us believe that little more, in our possibility to be in a very good position in the table."

"I think it was so important to start the new year with a win, away from home, at a very difficult place.

"From the beginning today, we showed massive energy and that is the team we want, and expect to see to get a good performance."

Of the City-Reds clash, he said: "It will be an unbelievable game and, of course, I am going to enjoy football, too. Both teams are the best in England."

"The day after we are going to play (in the) FA Cup and we need to

be ready again, because we have a very busy schedule."

Spurs, who are seeking their first piece of silverware since 2008, play fourth-tier side Tranmere in the third round of the FA Cup tomorrow, followed by the first leg of the League Cup semi-final against Chelsea next Tuesday.

THE TIMES, LONDON, THE GUARDIAN, REUTERS

'Cold' Emery won't play to Arsenal crowd

LONDON • Unai Emery insisted that he would continue to make "cold" decisions after he was booed by Arsenal fans at the Emirates on Tuesday, when he took off Alexandre Lacazette and brought on Aaron Ramsey during the 4-1 Premier League win over Fulham.

The Gunners manager said he would not listen to supporters because it was his job to make the tactical move to stop Jean Michael Seri

advancing from midfield.

Seri came on when Fulham trailed 2-0 and won possession at the start of the move that reduced the deficit. He looked as though he might create an equaliser.

The home supporters initially booed Emery but striker Lacazette, who scored his side's second goal, turned their reaction into cheers by applauding the Emirates crowd. Midfielder Ramsey then scored

within four minutes of coming on.

"We need to make decisions with a very cold mind that is for the best," said Emery, whose side have won only two of their last six games in all competitions.

"I understand the supporters, but I need to do my work. Our challenge is to improve defensively."

"Tactically, we thought we needed to change for more balance. We knew Seri was coming and needed a player close to him."

The Gunners were shaken by a 5-1 thrashing from leaders Liverpool last Saturday exposing their defensive frailty, and that weakness was evident again against the Cottagers. Their nerves were eased in the 25th minute when Granit

Xhaka struck after collecting a chip into the box from Alex Iwobi on his chest and slotting home.

Following Lacazette's goal to make it 2-0, Aboubakar Kamara pulled one back for Fulham in the 69th minute before Ramsey and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang rounded off the win for Arsenal.

Shkodran Mustafi came off at the interval after he felt a recurrence of the hamstring injury suffered last month. Arsenal are short of centre-backs but Emery said he had not spoken to Gary Cahill, available on loan from Chelsea.

"We can sign one or two players if the transfer market gives us an opportunity," he said. "But it is not easy." THE TIMES, LONDON, REUTERS

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Fri, 4 Jan 2019				

English Premier Manchester City Liverpool 4.00am LW*

LW* : Telecast available at Livewire (Singapore Pools) only. Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

LOTTERY

TOTO Thu, 3 Jan 2019, 9.30pm Draw No. 3437/2019

Cascade Draw Group 1 Prize \$8,000,000 est.

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LEONARD SILENCES THE JAZZ

Toronto star scores career-high 45pts to lift team closer to Eastern Conference summit

TORONTO • There were chants of "M-V-P" showered on Kawhi Leonard on New Year's Day at the Scotiabank Arena, as the Toronto Raptors forward stepped up to the free-throw line with seconds remaining in the game.

Soaking up the plaudits, he sank one of two baskets and celebrated the 122-116 National Basketball Association win over the Utah Jazz on Tuesday night with a career-high 45 points and six rebounds.

"It's great, because it means they see your hard work, your hard work is paying off and they appreciate what you're doing," Leonard said of hearing the chants.

"We made stops on the defensive end, which let us get out in transition and get to our fast-paced offence, and that's pretty much it."

"I try to stay in the moment and keep competing every possession and not worry about myself, just try to get a team win."

It was also a career-best 14th straight game in which Leonard has scored at least 20 points.

Pascal Siakam scored a career-high 28 points as well and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Raptors, who won their second game in a row.

With the win, Toronto improved to 28-11, keeping the pressure on

the Milwaukee Bucks in the Eastern Conference. The Bucks boosted their league-leading winning percentage to 26-10 with a 121-98 victory over Detroit.

The Raptors were again without the injured Jonas Valanciunas and Kyle Lowry, whose return date remains uncertain after he received anti-inflammatory injections to combat back pain last week.

In their absence, Leonard excelled, making all seven of his field-goal attempts in the third quarter as he scored 19 points in the period and the Raptors - who trailed by two at half-time - pulled away.

After making just two three-pointers in the first half, the Raptors connected on their first three from beyond the arc in the third to seize control of the contest.

They took a 10-point lead into the fourth quarter and, while the Jazz managed to cut the deficit to as few as four, they could not get any closer. Utah have now lost for the third time in five games.

"He was phenomenal," Raptors coach Nick Nurse said of Leonard.

"Kind of been waiting for one of these nights where he makes them all. He was great and he's a special, special player, as we know. That's good that we all got to witness that live and in person."

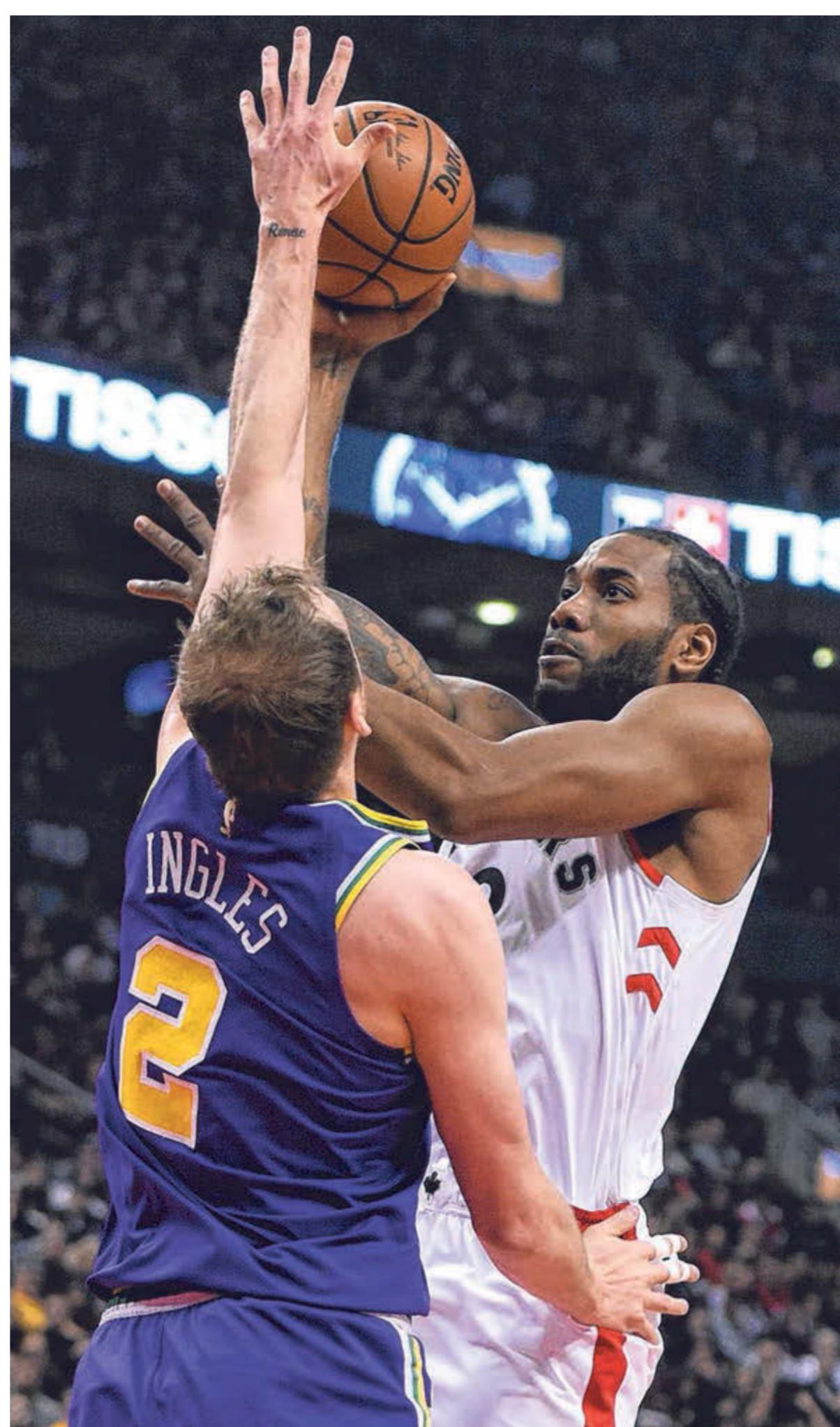
Jae Crowder scored a season-best 30 points for the Jazz (18-20) in the first of a four-game road trip. Derrick Favors added 21 points and nine rebounds while Donovan Mitchell notched 19 points.

"When a guy (like Leonard) gets going, it's hard to stop him," said Mitchell, who was held to 7-for-23 shooting.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

44

The Raptors set a franchise points record in the third quarter, when Kawhi Leonard contributed 19.



Toronto Raptors' Kawhi Leonard shooting for a basket over Utah Jazz forward Joe Ingles in the first half at the Scotiabank Arena. Leonard ramped it up in the second half on his way to a career-high 45 points. PHOTO: REUTERS

SINGAPORE SWEEP

Draw No. 1005/2019
and 4-D Draw No. 4363/2019
Date of Draw: Jan 02, 2019

1st Prize (\$2.3 million) : 241 7864
2nd Prize (\$500,000) : 282 7273
3rd Prize (\$250,000) : 210 2773

10 JACKPOT PRIZES (\$10,000 EACH)

1534511	2311450	2393697	2494868	2764150
3090561	3173599	3381944	3901200	3935107

10 LUCKY PRIZES (\$5,000 EACH)

1102370	1706475	2412795	2428851	2764176
2827092	2963490	3429078	4012228	4445580

30 GIFT PRIZES (\$3,000 EACH)

1011420	1221606	1405479	1430893	1467077
1513534	1515418	1522434	1792665	1934283
1996480	2006743	2046339	2402833	2461889
2566429	2666151	2712643	2846996	3037508
3213740	3221322	3491286	3556028	3626378
3628941	3924044	4148297	4328742	4416796

30 CONSOLATION PRIZES (\$2,000 EACH)

1019583	1189043	1315500	1447083	1553534
1587522	1640173	1644075	1696450	1708667
1814702	1878318	1922772	1932724	2148251
2435973	2549683	2550101	2603416	2846028
2892048	3037077	3102884	3127187	3188135
3641973	3720240	3952321	4412201	4429964

50 PARTICIPATION PRIZES (\$1,000 EACH)

1154963	1257921	1375396	1438536	1455425
1485189	1527397	1777098	1777136	1784650
1847024	1923599	1974714	1991037	2002580
2278838	2303683	2366867	2375095	2483076
2542739	2573877	2661464	2841354	2908274
3035765	3044001	3063273	3209150	3289851

3349996	3373958	3492971	3582515	3664771
3729929	380181	3821291	3830721	3855926
3863815	4004983	4032438	4081593	4098130
4208180	4265304	4277514	4292484	4328220

315,000 2D DELIGHT PRIZES (\$6 EACH)

Ticket numbers ending with

05	18	29
32	33	37
43	75	81

● The last four digits (underlined) of the First, Second, Third, 10 Jackpot and 10 Lucky Prizes of the Singapore Sweep Draw No. 1005/2019 form the winning numbers of the 4-D Draw No. 4363/2019.
● Prize can be claimed from Thursday, Jan 3, 2019.
Prizes not claimed by Monday, Jul 1, 2019 shall be forfeited.
● Prizes of any amount can be claimed at Singapore Pools (Private) Limited at 210 Middle Road, #01-01 Singapore Pools Building, Singapore 188994. Prizes up to \$5,000 per winning ticket can also be claimed at all Singapore Pools branches and authorised retailers.
● Visit Pools website at www.singaporepools.com.sg for full Sweep results and number checker.

He was named as a captain's pick by European Ryder Cup skipper Thomas Bjorn and Paul Casey duly repaid the faith by clinching 1½ points from three matches in the victory over the United States in Paris in September last year.

The 41-year-old Englishman will showcase his sublime shot-making skills at Sentosa Golf Club's Serapong Course from Jan 17-20 after he confirmed his participation in the US\$1 million (\$1.37 million) SMBC Singapore Open yesterday.

Casey was one of the world's most consistent golfers last year, achieving 12 top-20 finishes.

Five were top-10 finishes, including a victory at the Valspar Championship in March - his first PGA Tour win in nine years.

Casey has played in the Singapore Open once before in 2012, when he finished in a tie for 10th.

Said the world No. 22: "It wasn't a difficult decision to make (to return) as I have fond memories of the Singapore Open and Sentosa Golf Club."

"I played well there in 2012 and I was impressed by the golf course and the overall set-up."

"It is an ideal event for me to start the year and it will be a very good test early on in the year."

The former world No. 3 will be joined in the elite field by Ryder Cup teammate and defending champion Sergio Garcia.

The 38-year Spaniard, who won the 2017 Masters, will be making his third successive appearance in Singapore.

Other high-profile players teeing off at Serapong include 54-year-old American great Davis Love III, and 22-year-old Englishman Matthew Fitzpatrick, one of golf's rising stars.

Tickets for the SMBC Singapore Open are on sale via Apactix.

Sazali Abdul Aziz

SportsWorld

Shaw splashes on gifts for United staff

LONDON • Manchester United defender Luke Shaw entered the Christmas spirit of giving by spending £10,000 (\$17,280) on hampers from luxury London store Harrods for United staff, the Daily Mail reported on Tuesday.

The 23-year-old reportedly bought 40 hampers worth more than £250 apiece.

The hampers included fudge, mince pies, a Christmas pudding, tea, coffee and champagne among other luxury items.

Dutchman deadly at world darts c'ship

LONDON • Michael van Gerwen won his third PDC World Darts Championship on Tuesday after beating outsider Michael Smith 7-3 in the final at Alexandra Palace in London.

Englishman Smith hit an unexpected 124 checkout in the final leg of the fifth set to start a mini comeback that saw him win set six 3-0 and pull the deficit back to 4-2.

However, van Gerwen played his best darts of the match to win set seven and extend his lead to three, before breaking Smith's throw in the final leg of the following set to make a third world crown all but inevitable.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Back 'niggles' nothing new for India's Kohli

SYDNEY • Indian skipper and master batsman Virat Kohli yesterday played down fears that recurring back spasms could hinder his stellar career, insisting all players get "niggles" and they were "nothing new".

Kohli received treatment from the physio on Day 2 of the Melbourne Test against Australia last week, but insisted that it was not a major concern.

India will face Australia in the fourth and final Test in Sydney starting today, with Kohli's side leading 2-1 and seeking their maiden series win Down Under.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL

ABL HK Eastern v Mono Vampire (StarHub Ch202, 8pm).

CRICKET

4th & final Test Australia v India: Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 7.30am).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Man City v Liverpool (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 4am). Spanish LaLiga Villarreal v Real Madrid (StarHub Ch213, tomorrow, 4.25am).

TENNIS

Hopman Cup Group B: Britain v United States (9.45am), Greece v Switzerland (5.15pm) - Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209. ATP Qatar Open Day 4: Q-finals (StarHub Ch213, 8.30pm). ATP Maharashtra Open Q-finals (Ch201, 7.30pm).

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL

English FA Cup 3rd rd: Tranmere v Tottenham (Singtel TV Ch111, Saturday, 3.40am). Spanish LaLiga Levante v Girona (Saturday, 2am), Espanyol v Leganes (Saturday, 4am) - StarHub Ch213.

TENNIS

Hopman Cup Grp A: France v Spain (9.45am), Australia v Germany (5.15pm) - Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209. ATP Qatar Open Day 4: S-finals (StarHub Ch213, 11.30pm). ATP Maharashtra Open S-finals (Ch201, 9.30pm).

Live telecast times are subject to change. For latest updates, go to singteltv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

Casey joins elite S'pore Open field

The former world No. 3 will be joined in the elite field by Ryder Cup teammate and defending champion Sergio Garcia.

The 38-year Spaniard, who won the 2017 Masters, will be making his third successive appearance in Singapore.

Other high-profile players teeing off at Serapong include 54-year-old American great Davis Love III, and 22-year-old Englishman Matthew Fitzpatrick, one of golf's rising stars.

Tickets for the SMBC Singapore Open are on sale via Apactix.

Sazali Abdul Aziz

SPORT

'BIG BRO' GAO APPOINTED MEN'S NATIONAL COACH

Former paddler confident fully local-born team can deliver; prioritises this year's SEA Games

David Lee

"Big brother" Gao Ning has stepped up from teammate to head coach of the young Singapore men's table tennis team this year.

The 36-year-old retired from playing last year and was an assistant coach before the Singapore Table Tennis Association (STTA) announced his new appointment yesterday. Gao replaces Liu Jiayi, 69, who retires in three months.

Gao told The Straits Times: "I am very honoured to take over this team. I have been in the team for many years, and now I am still able to contribute as a coach."

"I feel I am a strict and responsible coach because these are the two qualities any coach must first have."

"I want to impart and share the tactics and techniques I learnt as a player, analyse in depth every tactical detail during training, and drill into each player a strong foundation of basic techniques."

The three-time Olympian takes over a team in transition and devoid of any China-born paddler af-



ter his retirement. In addition to Clarence Chew, 23, and Ethan Poh, 19, the STTA promoted Josh Chua, 18, and Koen Pang, 17, to the men's national team. Goi Rui Xuan and Wong Xinru, both 18, have joined the women's national team.

"This is a local-born team, and there is a long way to go as they are quite young and have a lot of room for improvement," added Gao.

"Those who were recently promoted, Josh and Koen, are not bad. Clarence has experience in big tournaments and will be our key player, while every player will need to improve all round."

Major events this year include the World Table Tennis Champi-

Former national paddler Gao Ning at the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast last year. He is proud to be made the successor to Liu Jiayi as the head coach of the men's table tennis team. ST FILE PHOTO

onships in April and the Asian Table Tennis Championships in September, but Gao has identified the Nov 30-Dec 11 SEA Games in the Philippines as a priority.

At the last SEA Games in Malaysia in 2017, Gao won gold medals in the men's singles and doubles (teaming up with the now-retired Pang Xue Jie), but the Republic lost the team gold to Vietnam.

He was encouraged by the team's strong showing at the South-east Asian Table Tennis Championships last November, when they swept the men's singles, doubles, team and mixed doubles gold medals.

"I hope they keep their feet on the ground and work hard to reach the top of the podium," he added.

STTA's senior high performance manager Eddy Tay referred to Gao as the young players' "big brother", and backed him in his new role.

He said: "This has always been the pathway planned for Gao Ning since he started his dual role as player-assistant coach in 2017. He has been helping Liu Jiayi and learning from him, so it is an easy transition."

"We also want to thank Coach Liu for his contributions since he joined STTA in 2014 and his willingness to help Gao Ning smoothly transit into his new role."

davidlee@sph.com.sg



Seven-time Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher poses with the Mercedes team in the pits of the Interlagos racetrack in Brazil to commemorate his last race in 2012. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Schumi still fighting at 50, under wraps

LONDON • Michael Schumacher's legacy is still revered in Formula One's history as the seven-time world champion turns 50 today, five years on from the near-fatal skiing accident that left the Ferrari great fighting brain injuries behind a wall of secrecy.

The German is still the sport's most successful driver in terms of grands prix wins (91) and titles, and F1's focus will be highlighting the remarkable career and talents of a man whose fame stretched well beyond the racetrack.

The Ferrari museum in Maranello, Italy, is today revealing a special exhibition, Michael 50, that the car-maker said is both a celebration and mark of gratitude to the most successful Prancing Horse driver ever.

Mercedes, the last team he drove for in F1 before retiring in 2012, will also have some of his cars on display at their museum in Stuttgart.

F1 management will dedicate a week to him on its social media platforms, including exclusive interviews with many of those who were part of the German's F1 story.

Hanging over it all, however, will be a strong sense of sadness – just as every anniversary since his Dec 29 fall while skiing off piste near Meribel in the French Alps with his family in 2013. He hit his head on a rock and spent months in an artificial coma after being rushed to hospital in a critical condition.

"We think a lot about him," Mercedes motor sport head Toto Wolff said. "He was an exceptional sportsman, and he's missed."

"As a seven-time world champion, he's missed within the paddock, he's missed as a consultant to us, somebody we've been looking up to. We hope that his recovery continues to be positive and that's the most important thing."

Just how positive, or otherwise, is a matter of considerable conjecture and one met with resolute silence from his wife Corinna, the family and those who always formed part of his innermost circle.

They would prefer the world remembered Schumacher as the champion he was, rather than the different kind of fighter he has become.

Yesterday, on the eve of his birthday, Corinna issued a rare statement but all she would say was this: "We are very happy to celebrate Michael's 50th birthday tomorrow together with you and thank you from the bottom of our hearts that we can do this together."

"You can be sure that he is in the very best of hands and that we are doing everything humanly possible to help him."

"Please understand if we are following Michael's wishes and keeping such a sensitive subject as health, as it has always been, in privacy."

A report in The Daily Mail last month suggested he is not bed-ridden or dependent on tubes any more. But it is believed that he is still receiving extensive, round-the-clock nursing and therapy care.

Amid enduring media speculation, it is rumoured moves for treatment elsewhere or speculation concerning Schumacher's general mobility, any shred of bona fide information from behind the walls of the family's lakeside Swiss mansion is news.

Jean Todt, Schumacher's former Ferrari boss who is now president of the International Automobile Federation, is one of a select few who is a frequent visitor.

He revealed last month that he had watched last year's Brazilian race with Schumacher.

In an interview with Germany's Auto Bild, he said: "Actually, I'm always careful when I say something. But it's true, I watched the Brazilian Grand Prix in Switzerland with Michael."

"There are pictures of him all over my offices and apartments. The time with Michael will be remembered as the best of my life." REUTERS

STAYING IN TOUCH

I'm always careful when I say something. But it's true, I watched the Brazilian GP in Switzerland with Michael. There are pictures of him all over my offices and apartments. The time with Michael will be remembered as the best of my life.

“

JEAN TODT, FIA president and Schumacher's ex-boss at Ferrari.



Long road back to form for Murray

BRISBANE • Russia's Daniil Medvedev showed Andy Murray just how much work he still has to do when he beat the former world No. 1 in straight sets at the Brisbane International yesterday.

Murray is making a comeback to competition after a disastrous 2018, during which he played just six tournaments and was out for 11 months with a hip injury.

He had a comfortable first-round win over James Duckworth, but found the going too tough against Medvedev as the 22-year-old Russian cruised to a 7-5, 6-2 win in just 80 minutes.

Medvedev is a rising star of the sport, winning seven titles last year

on his way to a world ranking of 16.

He broke Murray early in the first set and, although the Scot got back on level terms, Medvedev broke again late in the first set to gain the advantage. Murray was broken twice at the start of the second set to trail 0-4 and there was no way back for the 31-year-old.

"In the second set, I made a few too many mistakes, and obviously there was a period in the match from 5-5 where I lost six games in a row," Murray said.

"And I think when you obviously play better players, I mean he's 15th in the world or so, they will expose any errors that you make in your game or any shots that you're not

hitting particularly well. And he did that tonight."

Meanwhile, Rafael Nadal's MRI scan revealed a slight strain of his left thigh and, after consulting his doctors, he withdrew from the tournament to ensure he would be fit for this month's Australian Open.

In Doha, Novak Djokovic took just 55 minutes to claim his first win of the new year, brushing aside Damir Dzumhur 6-1, 6-2 in the first round of the Qatar Open on Tuesday.

At the Hopman Cup yesterday, Alexander Zverev and Angelique Kerber steered Germany closer to a second straight final after winning their singles matches against lower-ranked French opponents.

The German duo made it two wins from as many Group A outings in Perth, beating France 2-1.

Kerber had to come from a set down to beat Alize Cornet 5-7, 6-2, 6-4, while Zverev defeated Lucas Pouille 6-3, 6-7 (8-10), 6-2. In the Fast4 format mixed doubles, France gained some consolation with a 4-3 (5-4), 4-3 (5-3) win.

In the same group, Australia's Ashleigh Barty beat Garbine Muguruza of Spain 6-3, 6-4, before David Ferrer levelled the tie, beating Matthew Ebden 7-6 (7-1), 7-5. The Australian pair edged the mixed doubles decider 3-4 (3-5), 4-3 (5-0), 4-3 (5-3). AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Andy Murray attempting to hit a return during his second-round match against Daniil Medvedev at the Queensland Tennis Centre in Brisbane yesterday. The Russian won in straight sets. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

STAYING IN TOUCH

I'm always careful when I say something. But it's true, I watched the Brazilian GP in Switzerland with Michael. There are pictures of him all over my offices and apartments. The time with Michael will be remembered as the best of my life.

“

JEAN TODT, FIA president and Schumacher's ex-boss at Ferrari.

life

D

HOW MARK LEE DID IT ALL
Juggling movie and
sick daughter

D3



**It's a new dawn.
It's a new day.
It's a new life.
And I'm feeling good.**

- Michael Bublé

Live more,
Bank less 

Roma's reality check



Roma revolves around a man's memories of growing up in Mexico City with a domestic helper of another race and culture. PHOTOS: 20TH CENTURY FOX, GAVIN FOO, NETFLIX, SHAW ORGANISATION, STARHUB, WARNER BROS PICTURES

Director Alfonso Cuarón aims to uncover the damage inequality inflicts on all levels of society in his semi-autobiographical film



John Lui
Film Correspondent

The film Roma, now showing on Netflix, is based on a man's memories of growing up in a middle-class family in Mexico City. The family's domestic helper, a woman from another race and culture, grows close to the children in her care.

If the structure sounds familiar, it is because home-grown writer-director Anthony Chen's prize-winning Ilo Ilo (2013) is based on his recollection of what it was like to be a child who was as close, if not closer, to his Filipino domestic helper as he was to his own mother.

"Of course I know Ilo Ilo," Roma's maker, Mexican writer-director Alfonso Cuarón (right), tells The Straits Times last month when he was in Singapore. It was his only visit to the Asia-Pacific for the movie's release and he took questions at a screening presented by Netflix and the Singapore Film Society.

In the interview, he speaks about how his experience, like Chen's, is universal because migrant-worker experiences are universal. Unlike Chen, however, he did not feel the need to put a tight focus on the deep child-domestic carer relationship.

"That bond of affection is already implicit," says the film-maker, who made his name with well-received features in both his homeland and in Hollywood. They include the Spanish-language coming-of-age drama Y Tu Mama Tambien (2001) and the franchise movie based on the J.K. Rowling book, Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban (2004). He also won the Academy Award for Best Director for science-fiction thriller Gravity (2013).

In Roma, the nanny and house-cleaner Cleo, played by Yalitza Aparicio, is based on Cuarón's real-life nanny, Liborio "Lobo" Rodriguez.

He says his interest lies in exposing the damage that inequality inflicts on the soul at all levels of society.

"I wanted to explore wounds. The wounds of Lobo, of myself and the wounds we shared as a family. Also, the wounds share collectively with the whole of society," says Cuarón, 57.

Cleo, like Lobo, is from the Mixtec indigenous group, a woman who has moved far from home to take a job in the city and who has placed her trust and care into the hands of her white employers.

Around her swirl undercurrents that run through her host family and a nation with deep divisions.

"The presence of Cleo marks a lot of those things – the class divide, the one defined by race. Social class in a lot of countries is really deeply related to ethnic background. A country like Mexico, which is like many others, is profoundly racist."

"That creates a cycle of abuse and authoritarianism from one class onto another," Cuarón says.

Across the world, nannies and house cleaners like Cleo are particularly vulnerable to the worst of such predatory behaviour. She is shown working from dawn to well after

dusk, for example.

Cuarón reacts with surprise and dismay when he is told that Singapore enacted rules on giving domestic helpers one rest day a week only in 2013 – the same year that Ilo Ilo was released.

"You know, it is the same thing in most of the rest of the world. It is a job that is very unprotected, very vulnerable," he says.

Roma has been showered with acclaim, entering the best-of-2018 lists of many critics. At the Golden Globes, it has been nominated for Best Foreign Language Film, Best Director and Best Screenplay, and it is Mexico's entry for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars this year, where it stands a good chance of picking up a nomination.

There are interludes in the film which, while interesting in their own right, take on a deeper meaning if one understands the historical context.

In one scene, Cleo watches a group of men undergo a martial arts training session. Later in the film, the same young men are seen violently suppressing a student protest.

Those scenes are based on actual

events that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, says Cuarón.

"Kids, trash collectors, those without any privilege were given a sense of belonging and a sense of pride with martial arts," he says. They later became Los Halcones, or The Falcons, a government-backed paramilitary group that killed dozens of student protesters in June 1971.

Cuarón broke with tradition when he opted to distribute the film on online streaming platform Netflix instead of taking the usual arthouse cinema route. At the screening of Roma at Filmgarde Bugis+ last month, he explained his decision as one driven by factors such as accessibility.

Roma was made to be seen on the big screen and in surround sound, he says. But it is not up to him to dictate how others might want to experience the film.

"I recognise that the habits of users have changed, the habits of a new generation have changed also," he says. Netflix is not only able to deliver Roma on portable and living-room screens, but also reaches those who might never have seen the film if it had gone

only to cinemas, he says.

He takes the long view. Films such as Roma have what is known as a long tail – if it had been released in cinemas, it might have had an initial spike in viewership, but those numbers would eventually pale in comparison to the number of viewers who, over the span of years, would get to experience the film only online or on disc.

"If that is going to be the case, then (I should) at least create a big presence in those new digital formats," he says.

The other risk with going the traditional route is that slow-burn, character-driven films such as Roma tend to get pushed into arthouse ghettos and labelled as high-brow fare.

"I'm interested in reaching people at large... In theatres, Roma would be perceived as an arthouse film and I don't want it perceived as an arthouse film."

"I want it perceived as a film that everybody should see."

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• Roma is streaming on Netflix.

Alfonso Cuarón explores class tensions in Roma

SCAN TO WATCH



<http://str.sg/roma>

Cuarón's diverse films



GREAT EXPECTATIONS (1998)

This modern take on the 1861 Charles Dickens novel features Ethan Hawke and Gwyneth Paltrow as lovers who struggle with the social divide. In 2013, Cuarón revealed he regretted taking on the directing job as he had done it out of pressure to take on another major English-language work after the awards won by his first English-language film, the melodrama A Little Princess (1995).



Y TU MAMA TAMBien (2001)

Cuarón went back to Mexico after Great Expectations and made this Spanish-language coming-of-age story starring Diego Luna and Gael Garcia Bernal as machismo-fuelled youth who take a road trip with an older woman, played by Maribel Verdú. It broke box-office records in Mexico and earned a Best Original Screenplay nomination at the Oscars for Cuarón and his brother Carlos.



CHILDREN OF MEN (2006)

After directing the franchise movie Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban (2004), Cuarón took on this adaptation of the 1992 P.D. James dystopian novel. It failed to make a splash at the box office, but his action-movie take on refugee migration and hope in bleak times – helped by the flowing cinematography of frequent collaborator Emmanuel Lubezki – has turned this into a work whose reputation grows each year.



GRAVITY (2013)

Cuarón went full-blown science fiction with this major-budget work starring Sandra Bullock. The space disaster movie, penned by Cuarón and his son Jonas, grossed major numbers at the box office and also won Cuarón an Oscar for Best Director. Its visual realism, employing pioneering photography techniques to simulate body movement in space, spawned a cottage industry in pundits weighing in on which scene broke the laws of physics.

Actresses Leah Remini (left) and Jennifer Lopez, who are real-life friends, share a screen for the first time in the film *Second Act*.
PHOTO: GOLDEN VILLAGE



Meet Jennifer Lopez's best friend

Jennifer Lopez and Leah Remini, who play best friends in the movie *Second Act*, talk about supporting each other through heartbreak and trials in real life

Alison de Souza
In Los Angeles

Jennifer Lopez's friendship with fellow actress Leah Remini has lasted longer than most Hollywood marriages – including Lopez's own with ex-husband Marc Anthony, who introduced the women 14 years ago.

And the pair say they have supported each other through every heartbreak and trial since – including the end of Lopez's decade-long marriage to Anthony in 2014 and Remini's battle with the Church of Scientology when she left the organisation in 2013 and began speaking out against it.

The friends share a screen for the first time in the movie *Second Act*, a comedy opening in Singapore today. Remini plays the best friend of Lopez's character, a supermarket manager trying to reinvent her career in her 40s.

Speaking to The Straits Times

and other press in Beverly Hills last year, Lopez, 49, and Remini, 48, are asked how their friendship has endured.

Lopez – the star of hits such as romantic comedy *Maid In Manhattan* (2002) and crime drama *Out Of Sight* (1998) – says she cannot quite explain it.

"I don't know. You just meet some people and you just love them, that's it. You want to hang out with them," says the actress, who is also the pop singer behind chart toppers including *On The Floor* (2011) and *If You Had My Love* (1999).

"When we met, she was friends with my ex-husband, Marc. And then we met and we became friends – I stole her. We just hit it off from the beginning. We had chemistry."

Remini remembers that Lopez was not what she had expected.

"When I first walked up to her – it was at the premiere of Marc's movie, *Man On Fire* (in 2004) – I was, like, 'Oh my god, you're so annoyingly pretty up close,'" says the actress best known for the sitcom *The King Of Queens* (1998 to 2007).

"That was kind of a test to see if she had any personality and she just laughed. And I was like, 'And you

When we're not working, I'm at her house and she's at my house. We're in our sweats, hair up, no make-up on and we're cooking and dealing with our regular life.

ACTRESS LEAH REMINI on her friendship with singer-actress Jennifer Lopez

have a good sense of humour? This sucks, you're an all-rounded person.' I kind of fell in love with her there," recalls Remini, who is married to actor Angelo Pagan, 50, and has a 14-year-old daughter.

"And there are many things that I love about her. Her work ethic is amazing – you'll never hear her say that she's tired. But as a person, there's a whole other list of things."

Their friendship held fast as Lopez's fortunes continued to soar. She went on to become one of the most successful Latin pop stars in the world and headlined box-office hits such as the comedy *Monster-In-Law* (2005) and erotic thriller *The Boy Next Door* (2015).

"You see her as Jennifer Lopez and I see her as my friend Jen. I don't have a lot of celebrity friends – Jennifer is one of the rare ones and I consider her family. When we're not working, I'm at her house and she's at my house. We're in our sweats, hair up, no make-up on and we're cooking and dealing with our regular life."

When the two finally got to share a screen in *Second Act*, it was a breeze playing best friends.

"We wound up drawing a lot from us," Lopez says. "I would say to her, 'Do you remember when we were in your garage four years ago when

we were talking like this? Big conversation? That's what the scene is.' It would come very naturally."

For Lopez, it was also important to play a heroine whose career prospects are stymied because of her age, gender and lack of a university degree – and thus show there are more paths to success than a formal education and having the right connections.

"It's really important. People need to know there is not just one way to a path to success. There are many different routes," says the performer, who is dating former baseball player Alex Rodriguez, 43. She has two children – twins Max and Emme, 10 – with Anthony.

She adds: "That's why I love this movie. I grew up in the Bronx (in New York), I didn't go to college, and even with (my) dance (background), I had no way into show business."

"You have to find your own way, but it can be done. You just have to work hard. Hopefully, you have some talent and you work your ass off. The secret to my success, I feel, is that I work harder than everybody else. And I don't stop."

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• *Second Act* opens today.

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Second Act recycles old romcom clichés

REVIEW / ROMANTIC COMEDY

SECOND ACT (PG13)
104 minutes/Opens today/★★★★★

The story: Maya (Jennifer Lopez) is a supermarket employee with dreams of becoming the store manager, but she is continually overlooked as she does not have a college degree. When her friend's hacker son creates a fake resume for her, she lands a high-flying job at a skincare company. Everything appears to go well until a jealous young employee (Vanessa Hudgens) starts to suspect her.

Yip Wai Yee

The *Second Act* in the title here feels less like an opportunity for leading lady Jennifer Lopez to reign as queen of romcoms again and more like a platform for her to recycle old jokes.

Everything in the film here has been done before in other romantic comedies, including many of Lopez's own, such as *Maid In Manhattan* (2002) and *Monster-In-Law* (2005).

There is the sassy best friend (played by Lopez's real-life BFF Leah Remini) forever ready with a quip or two, the lessons about appreciating one's inner beauty, and the inspirational tale of how one can triumph in the corporate world with no college degree, but plenty of sincerity.

There is even that done-to-death

scene in films such as *Confessions Of A Shopaholic* (2009), where Maya pretends to be fluent in a foreign language at a work meeting and somehow manages to not only survive it, but also become all the better-liked because of it.

Except that none of this, for a film in 2019, is funny any more.

There is nothing wrong with the traditional romcom – streaming service Netflix has been particularly successful at producing a string of fun ones recently, such as *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* (2018) and *Set It Up* (2018).

But those managed to feel fresh, thanks to either the breezy dialogue or casting choices – *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* is the first mainstream teen romance to feature an Asian-American lead.

This film, however, feels like it is stuck in the late 1990s.

Big and tough year for Mark Lee

While filming his directorial feature debut last year, *Make It Big Big*, funnyman Mark Lee had to care for his sick daughter



Yip Wai Yee
Entertainment Correspondent

Last year was a particularly taxing one for home-grown actor Mark Lee, who had to split his time between two important things – finishing up his directorial feature debut as well as caring for his sick daughter.

But he chose to remain positive.

"I realised that it's possible to do two things at once and to do both properly. There were some days when I felt so anxious and stressed, but I told myself it was important to just keep going."

"I have an obligation to finish up my movie, but I also want to be there for my daughter," says the 50-year-old, who sat in the director's chair for the film, *Make It Big Big*. The drama

opens in cinemas today.

It was reported last August that his younger daughter Calynn, five, was diagnosed with glomerulonephritis, a rare disease where the body's immune system attacks the kidneys and potentially causes them to stop functioning.

News of her illness had gone public as his wife Catherine created an open Facebook page calling for messages of support for their child.

Lee says: "The good news is that Calynn's doing much better now. Her red blood-cell count is back to normal, but she still needs to take medicine to treat the bad bacteria in her body. She has been really strong."

He is "so proud" of how mature she has become.

"She knows that we have been stressed and so she tries to actively lighten our burden. When she

comes out of the shower, she would take the initiative to take her own towel and fold her clothes neatly.

"She also sits down and eats all of her meals on her own – it used to be a battle trying to get her to eat. She's a really good girl," he says.

Lee has two older children – daughter Calista, 10, and son Markson, seven. "They're a bit too young to understand mei mei's (Mandarin for little sister) illness, but they know to give way to her. I'm so happy."

The director recalls the one day when things came to a head.

"There is a big Indian dance segment in the movie involving 50 dancers.

"On the day of that shoot, I also had to take my daughter to the hospital. I was shuttling back and forth between the hospital and the set and

the stress was overwhelming. But, somehow, it all worked out," he says.

His film is a semi-biographical account of his life as well as those of his three radio DJ partners from the Love 97.2FM Breakfast Quartet show – Marcus Chin, Dennis Chew and Chen Biyu. They play variations of themselves in the film.

Lee is well aware the film may not appeal to those who are not fans of their radio show.

"That's why the film is not just about how we work as a team, but it also has other elements anyone can relate to."

"For example, my character has a lot of family drama and Marcus' character has to deal with money issues. These are general things anyone can understand and hopefully be interested in," he says.

And if the four radio DJs are not

enough of a draw, he points out that the film features cameos from many celebrities, including actors Christopher Lee, Fann Wong, Zoe Tay and Hong Kong's Chapman To.

In the movie credits, To, 46, has a special mention as an actor whose appearance in the film was free.

To and Mark Lee became friends after co-starring in the film, *King Of Mahjong* (2015).

Lee says: "I called him up to ask if he would be able to help me out for my first movie feature and he immediately agreed. I guess it's payback – he made me cameo in his directorial debut *Let's Eat!* (2016), so it's only right that he showed up in mine."

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• *Make It Big Big* opens in cinemas today.

While *Make It Big Big* is a semi-biographical account of the lives of (above from left) radio DJs Chen Biyu, Marcus Chin, Mark Lee and Dennis Chew, it also has relateable issues such as money woes and family drama. PHOTO: GOLDEN VILLAGE PICTURES



South Korean actor Yoo Ah-in plays a brash, predatory trader in *Default*. PHOTO: GOLDEN VILLAGE

Honest portrayals, by Default

REVIEW / DRAMA THRILLER

DEFAULT (PG)
114 minutes/Opens today/★★★☆☆

The story: It is 1997 and South Koreans are basking in the glow of their nation's surging economy. All except two people: Han Shi-yeon (Kim Hye-soo), an analyst with the Bank of Korea who sees trouble in the data she is crunching; and Yun Jeong-hak (Yoo Ah-in), a brash trader who suspects that a crash is imminent. Both, however, are mocked for being pessimists when the nation's mood is as buoyant as its stock market indices.

John Lui

Forget the tone struck by other money-matter dramas, such as the subtle suspense of *Margin Call* (2011) or the black comedy of *The Big Short* (2015).

This fast-paced but emotionally overwrought movie offers straight-ahead disaster action: There are good guys who warn of danger on the horizon and there are the villains at the wheel who ignore the

signals. When the ship is about to go under, there are cowards who rush for the lifeboats, while the noble do what they can to help others.

The Asian financial crisis of 1997 struck South Korea particularly hard and the devastation can be compared to that of an earthquake or tsunami – deaths from suicides skyrocketed and many lived hand to mouth.

Foreign aid, in the form of an emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was summoned.

A disaster-movie framework seems appropriate, then.

The story unfolds as a series of fast-paced interpersonal clashes, in which principled central bank watchdog Han fights a series of smug, horribly sexist old men who call her the b-word while violently sticking their heads in the sand.

Meanwhile, tricky financial concepts are simplified and spelt out in title cards.

Needlessly shoehorned into the boardroom drama is a heartstrings-tugging working-class-hero story, in which the honest, hardworking boss of a metal workshop bankrupted by the crisis tries to find hope in a hopeless situation.

Yoo, last seen as the blue-collar lover in Lee Chang-dong's acclaimed *Burning* (2018), portrays the maverick investment guru Yun, a man who, while weeping for the victims, has no qualms about getting rich off their jettisoned valuables.

He plays Yun as a predator with a degree of self-awareness.

He feels bad for his prey, but a wolf has got to be a wolf. His is the most interesting character in a roster made up of stock parts.

While the film is mostly correct about the real-life events of 1997 and accurately puts the blame on the corrupt and inept boys' club in charge of banks, the government and major corporations, it becomes weirdly xenophobic and conspiracy-theory wacky in the third act, when the IMF enters the picture.

In a depiction of villainy that might have come from *Black Panther* (2018), the IMF team is shown to be a group of white colonialists intent on enslaving the Korean people, and led by a boss played with slimy gusto by noted French actor Vincent Cassel.

Given the number of times Asians have been portrayed as bad guys in the West, perhaps that depiction is just deserts.

Ryan Coogler, Black Panther
In his favour: Coogler's arc as a director, moving from a Sundance prize-winner (*Fruitvale Station*, 2013) to a mid-budget studio hit (*the First Creed*, 2015) to one of the biggest movies of all time (*Black Panther*), is the stuff a classic career is made of.

Working against him: Black Panther seems certain to crack Oscar categories where no superhero movie has gone before, but it is possible this one will remain out of reach.

Though *Black Panther* earned a notable SAG nomination for its ensemble and a best-drama nod from the Golden Globes, Coogler did not score one for the latter's directing prize.

Peter Farrelly, Green Book
In his favour: This race-relations comedy about a black pianist and his white driver is a favourite for many in the academy. Its stars, Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali, are nearlocks to be nominated, and Farrelly's path from co-directing *Dumb And Dumber* (1994) to helming an Oscar contender will charm voters.

Working against him: The Best Director category increasingly favours

auteurs who can display technical showmanship, which is not a trait *Green Book* has in abundance.

Barry Jenkins, If Beale Street Could Talk

In his favour: Jenkins directed the 2017 Best Picture winner *Moonlight*, but the academy still has a few things it could make up to him. In addition to the infamous envelope snafu that briefly gave the top prize to *La La Land*, Jenkins lost the directing Oscar to Chazelle. As far as this year's race goes, Jenkins is one of the best-liked directors in this category, which can go a long way with voters.

Working against him: It is worrisome that the SAG snubbed *If Beale Street Could Talk* and may suggest that the film is breaking too late.

Yorgos Lanthimos, The Favourite

In his favour: From his unlikely camera set-ups to the perverse deadpan tone, you can identify a Yorgos Lanthimos film in seconds. The maker of *The Lobster* (2015) and *The Killing Of A Sacred Deer* (2017) has never made as accessible a film as *The Favourite*, but he did it without sacrificing that personal stamp.

Working against him: Might his avant-garde tendencies still prove a little too much for some members of the academy? Royal period pieces usually go a long way with this group, but Lanthimos pushed *The Favourite* into some untraditional places.

Spike Lee, BlacKkKlansman

In his favour: Lee is one of the most influential directors in Hollywood, but he has never been nominated for the Best Director Oscar. The academy has the perfect opportunity to make it up to him for the critically acclaimed *BlacKkKlansman*.

Working against him: At the 1990 Oscars, presenter Kim Basinger used her screen time to criticise the academy for failing to nominate Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989) in other categories besides Original Screenplay.

The directors' branch is very different now, thanks to the academy's diversity push. But has Hollywood's old guard changed enough to embrace a provocative film-maker who has made what some critics call his best movie in years? *NYTIMES*

Dancing lightly around Suspiria's many themes



Actress Dakota Johnson plays naive American Susie who travels to West Berlin in 1977 to train at an elite modern dance academy, but discovers strange events happening there. PHOTO: ANTICIPATE PICTURES

Italian director Luca Guadagnino's homage to the 1977 supernatural horror classic has many ideas, but most are undeveloped

REVIEW/HORROR

SUSPIRIA (R21)
152 minutes/Opens tomorrow at GV Paya Lebar/★★★★★

The story: Susie (Dakota Johnson), a naive American from a religious family, arrives in West Berlin in 1977 to train at an elite modern dance academy and becomes a star pupil under the tutelage of Madame Blanc (Tilda Swinton). She witnesses strange events, such as the disappearance of another student, Patricia (Chloe Grace Moretz), but spends her time making new friends. Loosely based on the classic supernatural horror movie of the same name directed by Dario Argento and released in 1977.

John Lui

At more than 2½ hours in length, this homage to the 1977 original feels more like a languorous black-magic ritual of the sort the women in the story perform than a dashed-off love letter.

Thankfully, Italian director Luca Guadagnino makes much of that stretched-out running time count, though one's patience is still put to the test.

The helmer of the romantic story *Call Me By Your Name* (2017) and the drama *A Bigger Splash* (2015), also starring Swinton and Johnson,

has created a movie that bears only a passing resemblance to the revered original – in a few plot details, characters and the supernatural framework.

Instead of drenching his frames in super-saturated primary colours, as Argento did, Guadagnino opts for chilly browns and greys.

Argento went for a beat-heavy rock soundtrack, courtesy of Italian progressive rock band Goblin; Guadagnino prefers the melodic wail and synths of Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke.

And in the background of the new film, festering political wounds, opened in Palestine and Nazi

Germany, manifest themselves as acts of terrorism.

More themes are revealed: the weirdness of motherhood and how the cultish worship of strong leaders only encourages elites to see the faithful as not much more than a food source.

None of the film's many ideas, however, are developed.

They are hinted at, then discarded.

There is very little of what one might expect to come from an R21-rated work of arthouse horror set in an all-female academy.

Susie (Johnson) never experi-

ences a sexual coming-of-age, for example – this is not *Black Swan* (2010) – nor does Guadagnino have any interest in any physical experience other than suffering.

And suffer the characters do.

The director uses every trick known to modern film prosthetics to create a work that offers more than atmospheric chills.

Bodies are punished in a manner rarely seen outside of the torture porn genre.

Under its arthouse skin, this film has a heart of pure grindhouse.

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Top10Movies

SINGAPORE
1. (2) *Bumblebee*
2. (1) *Aquaman*
3. (4) *More Than Blue*
4. (–) *Mary Poppins Returns*
5. (3) *Master Z: The Ip Man Legacy*
6. (5) *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*
7. (–) *The Possession Of Hannah Grace*
8. (6) *Ralph Breaks The Internet: Wreck-It Ralph 2*
9. (–) *Dragon Ball Super: Broly (Japan)*
10. (7) *The Grinch*

• Information from Cinematograph Film Exhibitors Association

UNITED STATES

1. (1) *Aquaman*
2. (2) *Mary Poppins Returns*
3. (3) *Bumblebee*
4. (4) *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*
5. (5) *The Mule*
6. (–) *Vice*
7. (–) *Holmes And Watson*
8. (7) *Second Act*
9. (8) *Ralph Breaks The Internet*
10. (6) *Dr. Seuss' The Grinch*

• Information from boxofficemojo.com

Bare, painful look at sexual identity

REVIEW/DRAMA

GIRL (R21)
106 minutes/Opens tomorrow at The Projector/★★★★★

The story: Lara (Victor Polster) is a 15-year-old Belgian male undergoing the process of transitioning to female. She has begun living as a female in the months before the start of hormone treatments and sex-reassignment surgery. Her family and friends support her choices, but after she transfers to an elite ballet academy, the school's physical and psychological demands begin to take a toll. Based on a true story.

John Lui

By coincidence, this is one of two films this week that revolve around femininity and dance. The other film *Suspiria* is horror (see other story), but this drama has its share of moments that are hard to watch.

There must be something in Belgium that produces strong, interesting films that deal with sexual identity, which go on to become the country's selection in the Best Foreign Language category at the Oscars.

In 2011, *Bullhead*, starring Matthias Schoenaerts in a breakout role, looked at a man who becomes a tragic caricature of manhood



In *Girl*, Victor Polster plays a teenage male who is in the process of transitioning to female. PHOTO: ANTICIPATE PICTURES

because of injected male hormones. Director and co-writer Lukas Dhont, who is making his feature debut, had intended to make a documentary about a trans-female ballet dancer who made the news, but after failing to get her cooperation, he opted to go the route of an "inspired by" film.

The style is deeply naturalistic, with a look that feels unscripted.

Dhont's camera follows Lara (Polster) from the time she gets out of bed, into her school's dance floors and locker rooms, her chats with her father and then to bed.

In between, this film, backed by

interviews with persons in the trans community, goes where few films about gender have ventured: the bathroom.

Here, in shots so intimate they feel like a shocking violation of privacy, the audience sees what it takes to pass as female when one is born biologically male.

Lara's bleeding feet, encased in delicate ballet shoes, become a metaphor for other parts of her body that have to conform to her mental image of herself. Polster, a first-time actor, is shockingly good as introspective, taciturn Lara.

There has been opposition to this

film from the trans community, who say it is a piece of voyeurism that cheapens their experience. That might well be the case, but there is much here that also deepens the understanding of the effort it takes to cross gender boundaries.

The bodily punishment of the dance studio pales in comparison to the humiliation Lara suffers as a person who violates norms, even in so-called liberal, progressive societies.

In one heartbreak scene at a party for girls, she gets a brutal reminder that being included in the group is conditional and that membership always hangs by a thread.



Founder of Illuminate, Singaporean Huang Muen's job as a lighting director is to ensure the visual effects go according to plan. He, his employee and a band programmer are the only Singaporeans out of 150 crew members touring with singer Wang Leehom. PHOTOS: ILLUMINATE PRODUCTIONS

Lighting the way for Wang Leehom

Local production company Illuminate's founder Huang Muen and his team were handpicked by singer Wang Leehom to be part of the concert crew following him on tour

Jan Lee

American-Taiwanese singer Wang Leehom is holding his concert here on Saturday and Singaporean Huang Muen will be among those watching him perform live – but not as a carefree fan.

He is the show's lighting director and his job is to ensure the visual effects go according to plan.

The 31-year-old and his team at Illuminate – a local production company founded by him in 2012 – were handpicked by Wang to be

part of the core concert crew following him on tour. Mr Huang was previously hired as the lighting programmer and operator for the singer's Music Man II World Tour (2013 to 2014).

Wang's current tour kicked off in April last year with two nights in Beijing and has since travelled to 13 cities in China as well as Macau.

Mr Huang is one of three Singaporeans out of the 150 touring crew members; the other two are an Illuminate employee and a band programmer.

He plays a variety of music instruments and says that gives him an edge when working with lighting, especially for live productions such as concerts, which make up the bulk of Illuminate's projects.

He tells The Straits Times: "As a lighting director, it helps to have musicality, to understand rhythm and translate the music into lighting."

"When used correctly, lighting becomes a powerful instrument

within the band and its effect is tangibly felt."

So what is the Mandopop star like behind the scenes?

"He's very nice and takes the time to remember our names. He's our boss, but also a friend. And he's really involved, he wants to make sure that the lighting for his show is top-notch and he will sit in on discussions with the lighting team," says Mr Huang.

Famed production and lighting designer LeRoy Bennett – who has worked with some of pop's biggest names including Lady Gaga, Bruno Mars and Ariana Grande – designed Wang's concert.

While the Singapore show will be scaled down slightly for the Indoor Stadium venue, it will still use more than 400 moving lights – "a bit insane", says Mr Huang.

Most indoor concerts use about 300 lights.

Mr Huang has been working in the industry for about 13 years. "I volunteered in church and it kind of started from there. I then got in touch with lo-

cal production companies, who started hiring me on odd jobs."

Mr Huang has several high-profile shows under his belt.

In 2017, he worked as a lighting programmer and operator for the Singles Day show in China, which is held by e-commerce giant Alibaba every year to celebrate its mega shopping event.

He has also designed the concert lighting for local artists such as Joanna Dong and Nathan Hartono.

Mr Huang hopes his involvement in Wang's concert will shine a light on local talent.

"There are a lot of talented individuals in Singapore who work behind the scenes, often at an international level. Singaporeans have many people to be proud of. It's just that most people don't know."

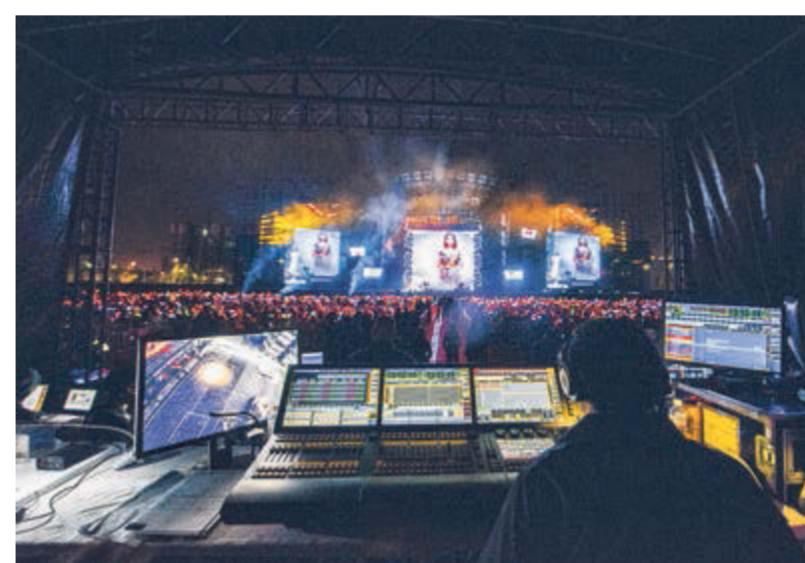
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BOOK IT / WANG LEEHOM DESCENDANTS OF THE DRAGON 2060 WORLD TOUR IN SINGAPORE

WHERE: Singapore Indoor Stadium, 2 Stadium Walk

WHEN: Saturday, 7pm

ADMISSION: \$188 to \$328 from SportsHubTix



One of the shows for Wang Leehom's Descendants Of The Dragon 2060 World Tour.

A rising star who often courts controversy on social media

WASHINGTON • Armie Hammer was sitting in a hotel room, in the middle of telling a story, when his publicist coughed. Loudly. He stopped talking and looked at her.

"What?" he asked, grinning innocently. "What?" He was not sharing a controversial anecdote.

But the need for a signal would not be a surprise. Hammer, who has become a Hollywood and Internet-favourite star over the last several years, has developed a reputation for having little filter, especially on social media.

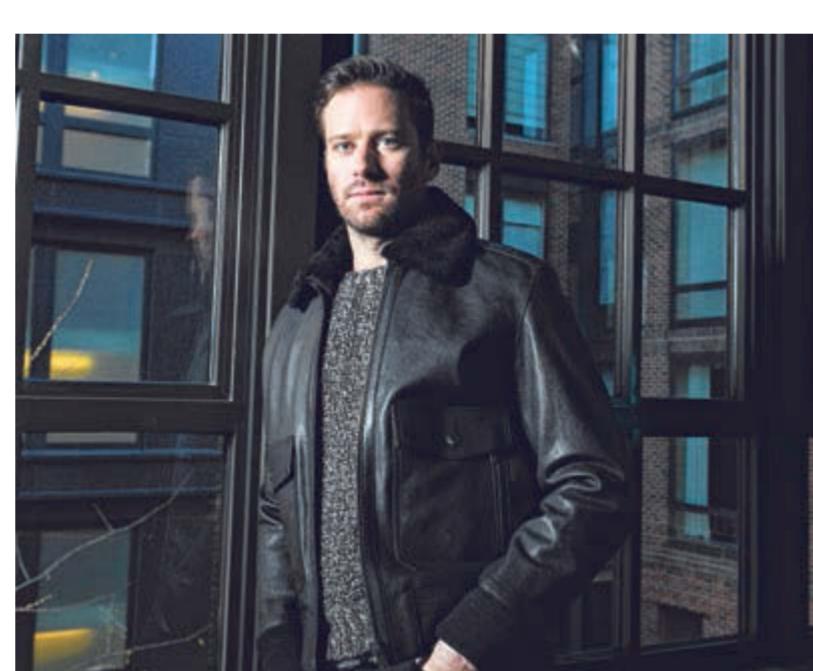
How often do celebrities say what they are really thinking, even when it gets them into trouble?

The stakes are high for Hammer, 32, steadily rising through the fame ranks with an eclectic career, from big studio pictures to indie films to biopics. He was in Washington to promote *On The Basis Of Sex*, released on Christmas, inspired by a true story of a young Ruth Bader Ginsburg (Felicity Jones) and her work on a groundbreaking tax case that changed how the courts viewed gender discrimination.

Hammer is in the co-lead role as her husband, tax lawyer Martin Ginsburg, who brings her the case.

Basically, it is difficult to typecast Hammer as anything except Extremely Good-Looking Guy Who Can Really Wear A Suit.

During the *On The Basis Of Sex* red carpet walk, Jones joked she



Actor Armie Hammer made headlines last year for critical tweets to a reporter, who wrote a lengthy piece about his career, and giving his take on performative grieving on social media when comics icon Stan Lee died.

PHOTO: WASHINGTON POST

even saw 85-year-old Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg's eyes "light up" when she saw him.

Hammer is aware of this and, as a result, seems especially enthusiastic when he turns up in the opposite of what people may expect.

He had a critically acclaimed turn as an evil boss this year in *Boots Ri-*

ley's dark comedy *Sorry To Bother You*. "There was no constraint, there was no, 'Okay, you just have to be the charming, funny, handsome guy' or whatever," Hammer said.

"It was like, 'Now you get to be a maniac, you can just go nuts, whatever you want to do is okay.'"

Hammer, the great-grandson of

an oil tycoon, grew up in the Cayman Islands and Los Angeles. He dropped out of high school with dreams of becoming an actor.

After a few TV parts, he landed his breakout role in 2010 playing Mark Zuckerberg's nemesis, the Winklevoss twins, in *Aaron Sorkin's The Social Network*.

Afterwards, he played everything: the prince in *Snow White* retelling *Mirror Mirror* (2012); a slave owner in *The Birth Of A Nation* (2016); FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's deputy in *J. Edgar* (2011); and a graduate student who falls for the son of his Italian host family in *Academy Award* best picture nominee *Call Me By Your Name* (2017).

Hammer had not gravitated towards wildly different parts on purpose, and that it was "an illusion" that any actor had control over his career.

However, he is careful about what he does not want to do. "Maybe this is just a naive take on my part, but I've always felt like it's okay to say no if you don't respond to something," he said. "You feel like you almost have to pay karma for every cent that you earn if you're not really invested in the project."

"I can think of only maybe one time in my career where I wanted to say no and didn't, and I really didn't enjoy myself."

Unlike some actors who claim

they do not pay attention to criticism, Hammer is tuned in.

He blamed the failure of *The Lone Ranger* (the 2013 big-budget flop with Johnny Depp) on critics.

And he made headlines last year for critical tweets to BuzzFeed reporter Anne Helen Petersen, who scrutinised his career in a lengthy piece titled *10 Long Years Of Trying To Make Armie Hammer Happen*.

He had another Twitter incident recently after the death of comics icon Stan Lee, as he critiqued a trend of performative grieving on social media.

"So touched by all the celebrities posting pictures of themselves with Stan Lee. No better way to commemorate an absolute legend than putting up a picture of yourself," Hammer tweeted.

After much criticism, he deleted the post and apologised: "While attempting to provide some unnecessary social commentary about the current selfie culture, I inadvertently offended many who were genuinely grieving the loss of a true icon."

When asked about what he learnt from the incident, Hammer paused before answering carefully.

"I think that there is a wrong way to be right," he noted.

The coughing publicist cut in before he could say anything else.

"That's how we're going to end it." WASHINGTON POST

Fake Beyoncé albums online expose problem

The releases, which appeared on Apple and Spotify, show these services are unable to vet the huge number of recordings that are uploaded every day

NEW YORK • At first the news seemed to follow a familiar, exhilarating pattern.

Two weeks ago, two new albums with material by Beyoncé – credited to the name Queen Carter – appeared on Spotify and Apple Music.

Social media exploded, assuming that Beyoncé, the master of the surprise album release, had repeated her magic trick yet again.

But the story quickly unravelled. Fans noticed that the albums were made up primarily of old tracks and demo recordings and the albums were taken down.

The Beyoncé album releases, it turned out, were a hoax, apparently uploaded to Apple and Spotify through Sounddrop, a do-it-yourself distribution service that caters to young, independent musicians.

Unauthorised recordings online are nothing new, of course, but are usually found on YouTube or on file-sharing networks.

Yet the fact that two albums by one of the biggest stars in the world were available on Spotify and Apple – two giant online outlets long seen by the music industry as bulwarks against piracy – is largely unheard-of. It did follow the release last month of demo recordings by R&B singer SZA, which, the head of her label said on Twitter, had been “stolen and leaked”.

For Spotify, in particular, which has made moves to allow independent artists to upload music directly to its platform – bypassing the usual controls of a label or distribution company – the Beyoncé and SZA leaks point to a possible risk for the company in maintaining its always-fraught relations with the big music conglomerates.

“This is a classic dilemma that all of these services are facing,” said Mr Panos A. Panay, vice-president for innovation and strategy at the Berklee College of Music.

“As you open up your platform, how do you ensure the accuracy and legitimacy of the content you are putting up there?”

Representatives for Spotify, Apple and Beyoncé declined to comment.

Services like Spotify, Apple Music and Tidal get most of the music they stream from a handful of distributors, many owned by the major record labels.

But in recent years, a vibrant independent sector has developed that



The Beyoncé album releases turned out to be a hoax and were apparently uploaded to Apple and Spotify through Sounddrop, a do-it-yourself distribution service. PHOTO: BEYONCE/INSTAGRAM

lets anyone upload his music and have it legitimately distributed to all the major online services, usually for a small fee.

Those services generally require users to state that they have the necessary rights to post songs. But with millions of songs moving through the ecosystem, errors and misrepresentations are not easily detected.

The two Queen Carter albums, Have Your Way and Back Up, Rewind; and the SZA songs, for example, were both apparently uploaded through Sounddrop.

A spokesman for Sounddrop said that uploading those albums was a violation of its terms of service and that the company took the releases

down as soon as it learned that they had not been released legitimately.

Sounddrop is cooperating with the streaming services in investigating the leaks “and will comply with the authorities with any follow-up information inquiries needed to press charges for this potential intellectual property theft”, said spokesman Dmitri Vietze.

The source of the leak was still unclear. Separate Sounddrop accounts were used to upload the Beyoncé and SZA tracks, but the company believed that the two were related and may have been the same person, according to Mr Vietze.

But the mere fact that known songs by a superstar like Beyoncé could have been placed on Spotify and Apple Music without permission – even if they had been attributed to a phony name – exposes the problems that these services have in vetting the huge number of recordings that are uploaded every day, said associate professor of music business Larry Miller at New York University’s Steinhardt School.

“If the details around how these platforms upload music are so automated and check-and-balance-free when it comes to artists of this stature,” he said, “then certainly leaks like this should give any platform pause to reconsider how uploading works.” NYTIMES

Dark topics and slick club vibes



ALTERNATIVE/ELECTRONIC
TAKE 2
Charlotte Gainsbourg
Because Music
★★★★

Yeow Kai Chai

In art and life, Charlotte Gainsbourg is a poster child for borderless creativity – and the perfect response to Brexiters. The daughter of French singer Serge Gainsbourg and English actress Jane Birkin, she is a contrarian darling, revelling in tough roles in the works of Danish film-maker Lars von Trier (Antichrist, 2009; Melancholia, 2011) and genre-erasing albums such as her celebrated 2017 disco-funk record Rest, which addresses the deaths of her father and her half-sister Kate Barry.

Take 2 is her latest EP produced by SebastiAn, the electronic whiz who also co-produced Rest and Frank Ocean’s last album Blonde.

In theme and musical direction, it continues the counter-play between dark, unflinching subject and slick club vibes.

The first single, Such A Remarkable Day, is a dance doozy with escalating synths and starlit keys and you would blithely bob along, only to realise midway that she is singing about the death of a woman, likely a victim of violence or a freedom fighter.

“Hope she was carried in ecstasy/Calmly defiant may she rest in peace,” she purrs in a determined wisp.

Bombs Away is equally infectious, a light-as-air dance anthem belying an unexpected post-apocalyptic scenario where “Babylon’s burning and a dynasty ends/Enemies, enemies will never be friends”. “Bombs away,” she sings, alluding to “Gomorrah”, “old Victoria” and a certain contemporary authoritarian-leaning statesman from across the Atlantic pond.

Her live version of Deadly Valentine, the masterpiece taken from Rest, is elevated to an epic near-eight-minute catharsis as she deadpans the wedding vow to macabre effect.

Her wonderful monotone is especially excellent in a live cover of Kanye West’s Runaway. The rapper’s self-reflexive commentary on fatal machismo and its impact on gender relationships is transformed by Gainsbourg into a bald confession about her own foibles. “Let’s have a toast for the scumbags... Let’s have a toast for the scumbags,” she intones, never missing a beat.

“Never was much of a romantic/I could never take the intimacy,” she comes clean, the song stripped into its most lonesome riff as it rings in the cavernous venue.

Darkly sonorous piano performances



20TH CENTURY CLASSICS
PROKOFIEV FOR TWO
Martha Argerich & Sergei Babayan,
Two Pianos
Deutsche Grammophon 479 9854
★★★★

Chang Tou Liang

At 77 years old, Argentine piano legend Martha Argerich continues to perform and record. A recent release is an hour of music by Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), transcribed for two pianos by Armenian-American pianist Sergei Babayan, the latest in a long illustrious line of piano duo partners.

Twelve movements from the ballet Romeo And Juliet are performed as a suite and there are several movements in common with Prokofiev’s own original set of solo pieces (Op.75) for two hands.

New are the evocative Dance With Mandolins and the scintillating music-box effects in Morning Serenade. The Gavotte is a familiar dance rehashed from the third movement of his Classical Symphony, while Death Of Tybalt provides a suitably dramatic and violent end.

Much of the music exploits the lower registers of two pianos. The results are brooding and darkly sonorous but richly detailed. Much less familiar are arrangements of Prokofiev’s incidental music from Eugene Onegin and Hamlet, film music from The Queen Of Spades, a waltz from the opera War And Peace, and one of his two Pushkin Waltzes.

The performances sound freshly minted and spontaneous, and are brilliantly recorded.

MusicCharts

APPLE MUSIC

- (2) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (4) Everything I Need – Skylar Grey
- (9) A Kind Of Sorrow – A-lin
- (6) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (5) Solo – Jennie
- (8) Without Me – Halsey
- (10) Ddu-Du Ddu-Du – Blackpink
- (8) Happier – Marshmello & Bastille
- (9) Taki Taki – DJ Snake featuring Selena Gomez, Ozuna & Cardi B
- (10) Girls Like You – Maroon 5 featuring Cardi B

• For the week ending Jan 2 in Singapore

SPOTIFY SINGAPORE

- (2) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (5) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (-) A Kind Of Sorrow – A-lin
- (7) Without Me – Halsey
- (9) Solo – Jennie
- (-) Everything I Need – Skylar Grey
- (-) Sweet But Psycho – Ava Max
- (8) Kiss And Make Up – Dua Lipa and Blackpink
- (9) Taki Taki – DJ Snake featuring Selena Gomez, Ozuna & Cardi B
- (10) Happier – Marshmello & Bastille

• For the week ending Jan 2

BILLBOARD

- (1) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (2) Without Me – Halsey
- (7) All I Want For Christmas Is You – Mariah Carey
- (3) Sicko Mode – Travis Scott
- (4) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (6) High Hopes – Panic! At The Disco
- (5) Happier – Marshmello and Bastille
- (13) Jingle Bell Rock – Bobby Helms
- (11) Rockin’ Around The Christmas Tree – Brenda Lee
- (12) A Holly Jolly Christmas – Burl Ives

• For the week ending Dec 23

HIT FM

- (3) The Will – Tanya Chua
- (18) Mr Hat – Grady Guan
- (7) Dwell On The Past – Li Ronghao
- (12) Ah Woo – Neko Highway
- (6) The Time Keeper – Fuying & Sam
- (-) Alibi – Alibi
- (8) But It Loves This World – Zhou Shen
- (15) An Addiction To Staying Up Late – Don Chu
- (9) One Second – Yoyo Sham with Eason Chan
- (2) The Cafe Of Lost Youth – Cyndi Wang

• For the week ending Jan 5

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'I'm much more hardworking than Andy Lau'

Jacky Wu declares himself the most hardworking guy in show business. He hosts three variety shows, has a concert lined up in May and runs several businesses

Yip Wai Yee
Entertainment Correspondent

Taiwanese entertainer Jacky Wu is one of the most successful and well-known variety show hosts in Chinese-language entertainment. Yet, he has led an "unhappy life", he says.

Speaking to The Straits Times and other Singapore media recently, he says in Mandarin: "I have spent too much of my time just working and earning money and for what? I have not been able to enjoy life."

Which is why he repeatedly tells his children to work less and have more fun, he says. Wu, 56, has four children - Sandy, 28, with whom he co-hosts the variety show Super Followers (2016 to present), as well as Vivian, 26, Olivia, 23, and Rick, 20.

"I would never want them to end up like me. Of course, I want them to do well, but they do not need to be as extreme as me," says Wu, who adds that he often wakes up at five or six in the morning and works until well past midnight.

He can certainly be protective of his kids.

His son, Rick, joked on Instagram that he would bomb Taipei City Hall if his girlfriend did not recover from an illness. Wu held a press conference in August last year to apologise for the controversial post and hopes that the public can move on.

He adds: "I'm not saying that what he did was right, but he had posted that only for his friends to see. He got in so much trouble mostly because he is Jacky Wu's son. As a son or daughter, you have to choose your parents wisely."

The veteran entertainer, who has been in the business for three decades, is currently the host of three popular variety shows: Super Followers (2016 to present), Mr. Player (2014 to present) and Hot Door Night (2013 to present).

He and his daughter were named Best Variety Show Hosts at Taiwan's Golden Bell Awards for Super Followers in 2016, while he was awarded Best Game Show Host at the same awards for Mr. Player last year.

Super Followers airs on CTI TV (StarHub TV Channel 827, Singtel TV



Jacky Wu runs several businesses, including restaurants, gyms and an artist management company.
ST PHOTO: AILEEN TEO

TV Channel 557) on weekdays at 9.55pm. Hot Door Night airs on Hub E City (StarHub TV Channel 111, 825) on weekdays at 7pm. Mr. Player airs on the same channel every Friday at 8pm.

Previously, he was known primarily as a singer and music producer with more than 25 albums to his name. His 1999 song Rooftop, a romantic duet with Taiwanese singer Landy Wen, remains a popular choice at karaoke sessions.

He can also be credited as the man who discovered Taiwanese superstar Jay Chou.

Wu thus proudly declares himself to be the "most hardworking guy in show business".

When a reporter points out that Hong Kong superstar Andy Lau is often cited in the media as the most hardworking celebrity, he immediately brushes off the notion.

"I'm much more hardworking than him. Andy Lau sings and acts - and I've done all of that, too. But I

also host so many variety shows and manage so many businesses," says Wu, who was in town to attend some work meetings for vacuum cleaner brand Delphin. He heads the company's Taiwan business.

He also runs several other businesses, including restaurants, gyms and an artist management company.

In July last year, he held his first solo concert at iconic Taipei Arena and both his shows were sold out within minutes.

"I was a little worried no one would buy tickets. When I tried to get into the website, it didn't work, so I thought that the site had malfunctioned. I called my manager to get it fixed, but he told me that it's because the tickets were all sold out."

"It's amazing that so many people still want to hear me sing," says Wu, who will be holding the concert in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in May. He adds that he would love to bring the show to Singapore some day "if fans

here want to see him perform".

It does not sound like he is slowing down at all this year.

"I don't really know how to stop, but I will try my best. It's time I learn to enjoy my life," he says.

yipwy@sph.com.sg

• Super Followers airs on CTI TV (StarHub TV Channel 827, Singtel TV Channel 557) on weekdays at 9.55pm. Hot Door Night airs on Hub E City (StarHub TV Channel 111, 825) on weekdays at 7pm. Mr. Player airs on the same channel every Friday at 8pm.

Jacky Wu wants to slow down



SCAN TO WATCH



<http://str.sg/jackywu>

Telemad

South Korean tiger mums meet Crazy Rich Asians



Yip Wai Yee
Entertainment Correspondent

How far would you go to ensure that your child gets accepted into the best university?

For the upper-class mothers in South Korean drama *Sky Castle*, the answer is that there are no limits.

The first episode demonstrates the type of scheming that is involved here: Housewife Seo-jin (played by Yum Jung-ah) throws a lavish black tie party, complete with a live string quartet, for her best friend Myung-joo (Kim Jung-nan) because her son Young-jae (Yu Seong-ju) has been

accepted into the prestigious medical school programme at Seoul National University.

Note that the party was not held for the student who will actually be attending school in autumn, but for his mother.

It soon becomes apparent that there is more going on behind the scenes - Seo-jin is throwing the party in the hope that Myung-joo will then give her a sneak peek at Young-jae's school grades and activities transcripts, so her daughter can emulate his success.

Indeed, it is the ambitious women of Sky Castle - the name of the luxury apartment building that they live in - who are at the centre of this drama as they continually think of new ways to up their children's college admission chances. In South Korea, the letters of Sky also allude to the country's top three universities - Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University.

Some viewers have compared this to the United States' Desperate Housewives (2004 to 2012) thanks



Yum Jung-ah plays a rich housewife with a competitive streak. PHOTO: SCREENGRAB FROM YOUTUBE

VIEW IT / SKY CASTLE

Viu

★★★★★



How much money have you made on your home?



SRX.com.sg/property-tracker

GoAheadQuoteMe



Anyone can play anyone in Shakespeare. I don't think there are limits.

“

ACTRESS SOPHIE OKONEDO on playing Cleopatra in a British production of Antony & Cleopatra



I portrayed a living, breathing human being. To do otherwise would be to do a great disservice to his victims and to history.

“

ACTOR BEN KINGSLEY on not portraying Nazi official Adolf Eichmann as a two-dimensional villain in the movie Operation Finale (2018)



That was the hardest thing for me to lose... every song, including Malibu, I lost because I always write it on paper.

“

SINGER-SONGWRITER MILEY CYRUS on losing her possessions, including the book of handwritten lyrics for every song she has ever written, in the recent Woolsey Fire

2018's 10 best movie villains



Josh Brolin as Thanos in *Avengers: Infinity War*

The jury is still out as to whether Thanos is a certified daddy, but all one can be sure of is how terrifying this purple warlord is.

He excels at accumulating shiny stones that contain ridiculous amounts of power. With a single snap of his fingers, he can obliterate half the universe's population.



Michael B. Jordan as Erik Killmonger in *Black Panther*

King T'Challa chooses to uphold Wakanda's isolationist policies to keep his people safe, but his American cousin Killmonger, who aims to liberate black people worldwide, sees this as selfishness on the part of such an advanced nation.

Some argued that Killmonger's ideals – if not his extreme hunger for power – were actually admirable and, as the Atlantic's Adam Serwer pointed out, the fact that a comic book movie villain could inspire such a debate "is a testament to how profound and complex the character is".



Steven Yeun as Ben in *Burning*

Burning is certainly well-written, but Yeun's acting is what landed Ben – a mysterious rich man who serves as romantic rival to the film's protagonist, Jongsu – on this list.

The role gave Yeun an opportunity to showcase a side of himself that viewers had not quite seen before. Ben's every action is effortlessly sinister, even when he is not talking about his habit of burning down abandoned greenhouses.

Warning: Some of the blurbs below contain spoilers

Nicholas Hoult as Robert Harley in *The Favourite*

There is not really a villain in *The Favourite*, Yorgos Lanthimos' humorous drama about two cousins fighting to be Queen Anne's favourite in 18th-century England, so calculating politician and leader of the opposition Robert Harley might be the closest thing viewers get to one.

That said, he does all the things traditional bad guys do – and well: He manipulates the lead characters by exploiting their weaknesses, ticks them off with snippy digs and does it all in fabulously elaborate costumes. Hoult, whose penchant for sarcasm has been evident since TV series *Skins* (2007 to 2013), is perfect in this role.

Ann Dowd as Joan in *Hereditary*

For how kind Dowd seems in real life, she sure does a good job of terrifying audiences.

The veteran actress, who won an Emmy in 2017 for playing the wicked Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale*, went from being sweet and grandmotherly to being believably possessed by a devilish spirit over the course of *Hereditary*. While Joan was not technically the horror flick's main villain, moviegoers certainly would not drink tea at her home anytime soon.

Armie Hammer as Steve Lift in *Sorry To Bother You*

Sorry To Bother You, about a black telemarketer who speaks in his "white voice" to achieve professional success, is very ambitious in the number of social issues it attempts to tackle, and the evils of capitalism rank high.

Hammer plays Lift, the psychopathic CEO of a morally bankrupt company – essentially, the most 2018 villain of all.

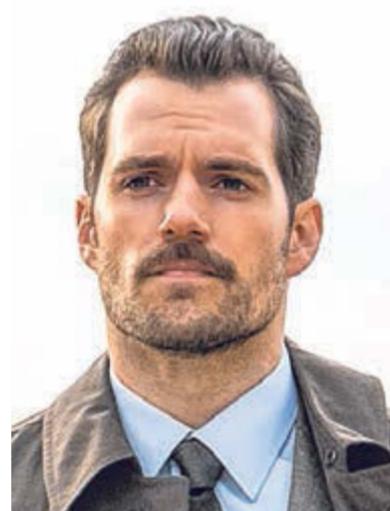
Daniel Kaluuya as Jatemme Manning in *Widows*

If you saw *Widows* in theatres, there is a good chance Kaluuya's character haunted your dreams that night.

Manning is ruthless, willing to do whatever it takes to keep Chicago mobsters loyal to his crime boss brother, Jamal, who is running for city council.

As viewers learnt with *Get Out* (2017), Kaluuya has perfected the art of conveying emotion – or a lack thereof, in Jatemme's case – through his eyes, rather than just his words. *WASHINGTON POST*

PHOTOS: SHAW ORGANISATION, UIP, WALT DISNEY PICTURES, WASHINGTON POST



Henry Cavill as August Walker in *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*

The big and actually surprising reveal of *Fallout* is that CIA agent Walker is actually John Lark, a man who aims to kill a large portion of the world's population.

"There cannot be peace without, first, a great suffering," Lark states in a manifesto that could easily have been written by Thanos.

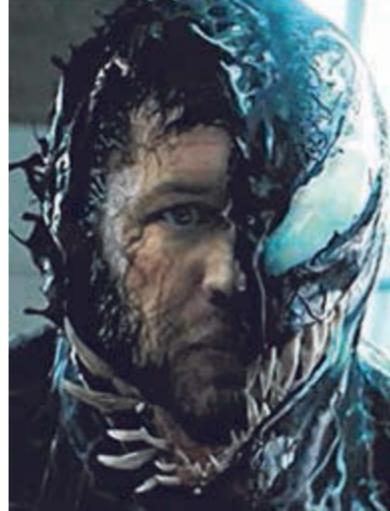
Cavill's excellent deadpan turn makes his villainy all the more unsettling, proof that it does the actor well to step away from playing a caped superhero every so often.



Hugh Grant as Phoenix Buchanan in *Paddington 2*

Some of the best villains are those who surprise moviegoers and *Paddington 2* features Grant, of all people, skulking around in a nun's costume while plotting against an innocent Peruvian bear.

He also leads a song-and-dance number that takes place in a pastel-coloured prison. Need one say more?



Tom Hardy as Venom in *Venom*

Venom is among the most ridiculous movies of 2018, emphasised by the dialogue between journalist Eddie Brock (Hardy) and the alien parasite that merges with his body. But that is also what makes it so great.

Between the parasite telling Eddie that he, too, was a "loser" on his home planet and his actual voice in Eddie's head nearing the intensity of Christian Bale's Batman voice, Venom carries what might be one of the most enjoyable bad movies of recent film history.

Impact of social media on Ariana Grande and Pete Davidson

Emily Yahr

You can't truly describe the year 2018 without talking about Ariana Grande and Pete Davidson.

Like so many inexplicable pop-culture sensations, Grande and Davidson's relationship – engaged after three weeks, broken up after about six months, resulting in Grande's self-acceptance smash *Thank U, Next* – was a spectacle.

It was something to be dissected and gawked at and joked about, by everyone from casual fans to Davidson's fellow cast members on Saturday Night Live (SNL). That is, until it wasn't funny at all.

Last month, Davidson posted on Instagram about the consequences of the newfound attention, particularly "getting online bullied and in public by people for nine months."

A couple weeks later, after convoluted Twitter argument between Grande and Kanye West, Davidson posted an alarming message: "i really don't want to be on this earth anymore. i'm doing my best to stay here for you but i actually don't know how much longer i can last. all i've ever tried to do was help people. just remember i told you so."

Shortly after, the New York Police

Department confirmed it made contact with Davidson after a wellness check; Davidson appeared briefly on SNL that night.

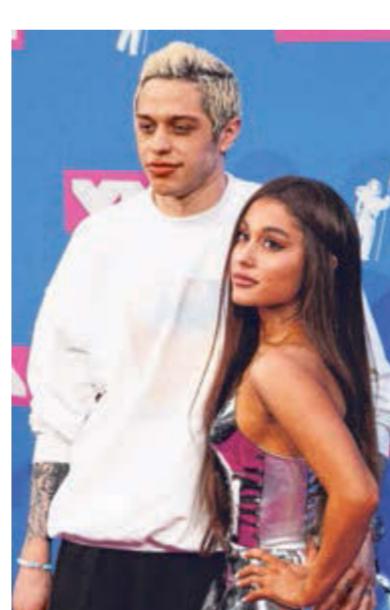
Since then, he has deleted his Instagram account and kept a low profile. Davidson has talked openly about his mental health and this was an especially stark reminder of the stakes involved when pop-culture figures are simply seen as entertaining distractions, as opposed to a reflection of people's own anxieties and struggles and beliefs.

This proved true repeatedly throughout 2018, as celebrity news was intertwined with some of our culture's most urgent issues, particularly involving mental health.

Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade committed suicide in the same week. Demi Lovato, outspoken about her addiction issues, overdosed and went to rehab. The already-fractured political world was thrown into a frenzy when West, who addressed his bipolar diagnosis on his album this summer, visited the White House.

But no two entertainers found themselves the subject of a wider variety of news stories last year than Grande and Davidson.

What seemed at first like a little diversion from the "real world"



Singer Ariana Grande and comedian Pete Davidson's relationship was dissected and joked about until it wasn't funny. PHOTO: REUTERS

quickly turned into one of the best ways to understand the real world.

In August, after performing at Aretha Franklin's funeral, Grande experienced a "#MeToo sexual-harassment moment in progress", as The Washington Post put it.

The officiating pastor put his arm around Grande with his hand against the side of her breast; Grande stood rigidly and laughed politely as the pastor spoke, but was unable to move away.

"This casual harassment, of faint boundaries tested and crossed, is what keeps society blind to the greater abuses at play. It is what gaslights women and the people around them into thinking that they imagined the offence," The Post's Kate Woodsome wrote. "But this time, it was caught on tape."

A week later, Pittsburgh rapper Mac Miller, whom Grande dated for two years, died at age 26; officials said the cause was a mix of the powerful opioid fentanyl, cocaine and alcohol.

Grande disabled her Instagram comments soon after, as trolls flooded her account to blame her for Miller's death.

A few weeks later, she and Davidson called off their engagement; the tabloids reported that while they had other issues, Miller's death put a "strain" on their relationship.

It was somewhat wishful thinking, as the year continued to hammer home the fact that social media abuse has never been worse.

Last month, Davidson – who has

talked about being diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and having suicidal thoughts for years – received some of the horror he received.

"No matter how hard the internet or anyone tries to make me kill myself, I won't. I'm upset I even have to say this. To all those holding me down and seeing this for what it is – I see you and I love you," he wrote.

Soon after, Grande posted on Instagram and asked her fans to "be gentler with others, even on the internet".

She has also been a vocal advocate of erasing stigmas around mental health. After she dropped *Thank U, Next* in November, which preached self-acceptance, a fan joked on Twitter, "who is ariana's therapist and are they accepting new clients".

Grande saw the tweet and topped it off with a response, which has since been retweeted 93,000 times: "if you're afraid to ask for help, don't be. u don't have to be in constant pain & u can process trauma. i've got a lot of work to do but it's a start to even be aware that it's possible." *WASHINGTON POST*

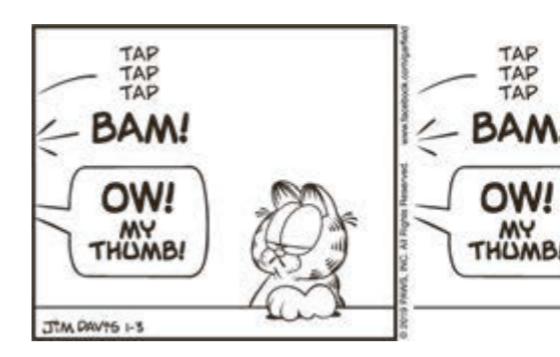
• The Samaritans of Singapore can be reached on 1800-221-4444, while the Singapore Association for Mental Health can be reached on 1800-283-7019.

Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (V)
6.40 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Worst Cooks In America 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)
1.30 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 3 (SC)
2.30 On The Red Dot - We Are Family (HD) (CC) (CA)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (IE)
4.00 Meet The MP (HD) (PG) (SC)
4.30 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (V)
6.30 Divided (US) (HD) (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)
7.30 World's Funniest Videos: Top 10 Countdown 2 (HD) (PG) (CC) (V)
8.30 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Don't Make Us Invisible (HD) (PG) (CC) (IE)
10.00 The Brave (HD) (PG) (13) (D)
11.00 NCIS 14 (HD) (PG) (13) (D)
AM
12.00 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
12.30 Whacked Out Sports (HD) (PG) (V)
12.50 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
1.30 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
1.40 This Is Us (HD) (PG) (D)
2.30 Grimm 5 (HD) (PG) (D)
3.20 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
3.50 Worst Cooks In America 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
4.40 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (V)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Golden Age Talentime (CC) (V)
7.00 Sidewalk Scientist (IE)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)

8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)

10.00 Fruit, Veggies & Me 2 (CC) (IE)

10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)

PM

12.30 JML Home Shopping (Infomercial)

1.00 News 8 At One (HD)

1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)

2.00 Little Counsellor (HD) (S)

2.30 Your Hand In Mine (HD) (CC) (D)

3.30 Classic Golden Melody 2018 (V)

4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)

5.30 118 Reunion (PG) (CC) (D)

6.30 Hello Singapore (HD) (CA)

7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)

8.00 Top 10 Singapore (CC) (IE)

9.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)

10.00 News Tonight (HD)

10.30 Focus (CC) (CA)

11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)

AM

12.00 The Princess Weiyoung (PG) (D)

1.00 Chef Apprentice (V)

2.00 Changing Fortunes (D)

4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM

3.00 Unique Towns (HD) (CC) (IE)

4.00 The Food Detectives (IE)

4.30 The Work Goes On (IE)

5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)

6.00 The Menu (PG) (CC) (D)

7.00 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)

9.00 World Food (CC) (IE) (Debut)

10.00 Black Knight (PG) (CC) (D)

11.00 News Tonight

11.30 World Food (CC) (IE) (Debut)

AM

12.30 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)

2.30 Close

CNA

AM

6.00 Singapore Tonight

7.00 First Look Asia

9.00 Asia Business First

10.02 Real Deal

11.00 News Now

1.02 Champions For Change

2.00 News Now
4.02 Real Deal
5.00 News Now

7.02 Champions For Change (CC)

8.00 Primetime Asia

9.02 Deciphering Indonesia With Cheryl Marella (CC)

10.00 Singapore Tonight

11.02 Champions For Change (AM)

12.00 News Now

12.30 Power List Asia 6

1.02 Deciphering Indonesia With Cheryl Marella

2.00 News Now

2.30 The Successors 5

3.02 Real Deal

4.00 News Now

4.30 Millionaire Minds

5.02 Deciphering Indonesia With Cheryl Marella

VASANTHAM

PM

3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)

3.30 Azhagiya Snehithi 2 (IE)

4.00 Sundaram Kudumbathin (HD) (D)

4.30 Vivegam (IE)

5.30 Mighty Raju (S)

6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (PG) (D) (Hindi)

7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam (Cul)

7.30 Mella Thiranthathu Kathavu 2 (PG) (CC) (D)

8.00 Adukku Veetu Annasamy (HD) (CC) (D)

8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)

9.00 Kanavu Meippada 2 (CC)

10.00 Kannan Kannum Kolaiyadithal (PG) (CC) (D)

10.30 Bayam (PG) (CC) (D)

11.00 Nyagam Varuthae 3 (V)

11.30 Tamil Seithi (News) (R)

AM

12.00 Close

SURIA

PM

4.00 Seindah Takdir Cinta (PG) (D)

5.00 Sri Bella (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)

6.00 Kisah Kita (HD) (S)

6.30 Siapa Master? (HD) (IE)

7.00 Teratai Kemboja (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)

8.00 Berita (HD) (News)

8.30 Jalan 7 (HD) (PG) (IE)

9.30 Ti Amo, Sweetheart 100 Hari! (PG) (CC) (D) (Debut)

10.30 Dara Zara (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)

11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)

AM

12.00 Close

PM

12.00 Bugsville (P)

12.30 Teddies (P)

1.00 Little Charmers (HD) (P)

1.30 Messy Goes To Okido (HD) (P)

2.00 Floogals (HD) (P)

2.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)

3.00 Dora The Explorer (HD) (P)

3.30 Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood (HD) (P)

4.00 All Over The Workplace (PG) (S)

4.30 Shazzade: The Untold Stories (S)

5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (HD) (S)

5.30 Grizzy & The Lemmings (S)

6.00 The Lion Guard (S)

6.30 Fabulous (HD) (S)

7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (HD) (S)

7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (HD) (CC) (S)

8.00 Star Wars Rebels (HD) (CC) (S)

8.30 Inazuma Eleven (HD) (CC) (S)

9.00 AFF Suzuki Cup 2018 (HD) (Sports) (Encore)

11.00 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)

12.00 Close

Radio

KISS92

AM

6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning

10.00 Carol Smith

PM

1.00 Charmaine Yee

4.00 Shan Wee

8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM

6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman

10.00 Cheryl Miles

PM

4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

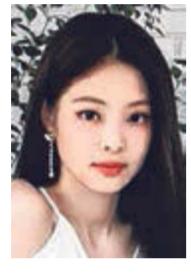
MONEY FM 89.3

AM

6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang

10.00 Midday With Howie Lim

Are EXO's Kai and Blackpink's Jennie dating?



SEOUL • There might be a new power couple in K-pop on the horizon as reports have revealed EXO's Kai and Blackpink's Jennie (both left) are dating.

The singers, from two of K-pop's most popular groups, were seen walking while holding hands in a park in Seoul, South Korean entertainment news portal Dispatch reported on Tuesday.

Pictures obtained by the media outlet show the two going for a drive around Sangam-dong before strolling at Haneul Park where they were seen layered up in coats and scarves to brace themselves against the cold.

The report also said Kai, 24, drove all the way to where Jennie, 22, lives with a gift he bought from Hawaii, where his group EXO visited last month.

Following the news on Tuesday, Kai's agency S.M. Entertainment told Yonhap News Agency that the two have "positive feelings" for each other.

Jennie's agency YG Entertainment, however, was kept in the dark about the relationship, according to multiple reports.

Kai's Instagram post on Nov 25 shows him standing in the dark at what appears to be Haneul Park, which Dispatch says is a photo taken by Jennie.

The Instagram post has been showered with comments congratulating the new couple, with some fans showing disappointment.

One fan wrote: "If the rumour is true, be happy with each other." Another fan asked in disbelief: "So it was Jennie who took this photo?"

Twitter also erupted with hashtags related to the reported relationship, which dominated the Twitter trends list in Seoul on the first day of this year.

Jennie was trending even in Canada, with more than 350,000 tweets posted about the Blackpink singer. One Twitter user quipped: "I guess Jennie isn't going solo", seemingly referring to her song Solo.

On the same day last year, Dispatch surprised K-pop fans with the news that singer G-dragon was dating fellow singer Lee Joo-yeon, a former member of girl group After School. THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Jay Chou's son sailing with grandpa



Taiwanese pop superstar Jay Chou's wife, actress-model Hannah Quinlivan, posted a photo of her son Romeo with her father on a yacht on the first day of the new year. Taiwan's China Times reported that Chou and Quinlivan are currently on vacation in Australia. The couple have two children - daughter Hathaway, three, and son Romeo, one. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/KUN LING HANNAH

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Lee Siew Hua
Travel Writer,
The Straits Times

Indian veteran actor Kader Khan dies at 81

NEW DELHI • Indian veteran actor Kader Khan died on Monday at a hospital in Canada, his family members said on Tuesday.

The actor died at 81 after a prolonged illness at a hospital in Toronto.

His son Sarfaraz told India's semi-official news agency Press Trust of India that Khan died at 6pm Canadian local time on Monday.

"He slipped into a coma in the afternoon. He was in the hospital for 16 to 17 weeks," Mr Sarfaraz was quoted as saying.

Khan's funeral would be held in Canada.

Born in 1937 in Afghanistan's Kabul, Khan made his debut in 1973 in Bollywood Hindi film Daag.

He acted in more than 300 films, mainly in mainstream Bollywood productions. He also wrote dialogues for more than 250 movies.

"A brilliant stage artist, a most compassionate and accomplished talent on film," Indian superstar and veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan wrote in a condolence message on Twitter.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also sent his condolences and recalled Khan's long career in theatre and films.

"Kader Khan Ji brightened the screen with his stupendous acting skills and lightened it thanks to his unique sense of humour," Mr Modi said in a statement.

"He was also a prolific screenwriter, associated with many memorable films. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family and admirers." XINHUA

Growth of Chinese movie box-office revenue in 2018 slows

BEIJING • China's movie box-office revenue rose 9 per cent last year to 60.98 billion yuan (\$12 billion), state media reported, a slower pace than the 13.45 per cent clocked for 2017.

Domestic films recorded ticket sales of 37.9 billion yuan last year, accounting for 62 per cent of the total box office, the official Xinhua news agency said late on Monday, citing data from the State Film Administration.

Domestic films in 2017 accounted for 54 per cent of total box office.

China is the second-largest movie market globally after the United States, though it already has more total movie screens after years of rapid expansion in theatre networks.

The number of movie screens reached 60,079 across the country, an increase of 9,303 from 2017, Xinhua said. That compares to just more than 40,000 screens in the United States, according to data from US-based National Association of Theatre Owners.

China, which is on track to eventually overtake the North America film market, has become an increasingly important region for global producers looking to pump up their box-office returns, despite a quota on imported films and strict censorship.

China has been seeking to promote home-grown productions to rival imported Hollywood films. But several big-budget Chinese films have flopped while more modest productions have done well, highlighting the challenges China faces.

Last year, Dying To Survive, a low-budget Chinese comedy-drama without big stars, became the summer smash hit, while Asura, the big-budget, star-studded epic on mythology, bombed at the box office and was withdrawn immediately after its opening weekend.

Trade magazine Variety called it "the most expensive flop in Chinese history". REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

Buzzing

Re-scheduling of Andy Lau concert in the works

Focus Entertainment, the organiser of My Love Andy Lau World Tour - Hong Kong 2018, has announced that it has applied for the use of Hong Kong Coliseum as it hoped that the cancelled shows can be re-scheduled to December this year - the earliest available period.

It said that fans with valid tickets will be able to choose to accept the concert re-scheduling arrangement or seek a ticket refund if the application is successful. The concert organiser will arrange for refunds if the application is unsuccessful.

Seven shows of the Andy Lau concert from last Friday to today were cancelled after Lau was diagnosed with flu and under doctor's orders to rest until he was fully recovered.

Stranger Things back with third season

Netflix has confirmed that the third season of Stranger Things will premiere on July 4.

The hit nostalgic supernatural drama tells the story of a group of young friends living in a small town in Indiana in the 1980s and the odd happenings that threaten them all, Agence France-Presse reported.

Stranger Things has garnered 31 Emmy nominations, including two for Outstanding Drama Series.

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THE STRAITS TIMES SINGAPOREAN OF THE YEAR 2018

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The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, organised in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of the human spirit

Harbhajan Singh

The veteran nurse led a team of more than 100 nurses in the 2003 fight against Sars, the severe acute respiratory syndrome. Today, at the age of 78, Harbhajan Singh continues to work at the very hospital he first joined as a young man aged 25.

FINALIST

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

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B | HOME

Raffles does a 'disappearing' act in North Boat Quay



The white, polymarble statue of Sir Stamford Raffles by the Singapore River (left) has been partially painted over to blend in with the OCBC Centre building across the water (below left). PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO, JASMINE CHOONG



Statue painted to create trick-eye effect for Singapore Bicentennial

Vanessa Liu

The white, polymarble statue of Sir Stamford Raffles in North Boat Quay appears to be "disappearing".

Since last Saturday, the landmark at the location where Raffles was believed to have first set foot on Singapore in 1819 has been partially covered in dark grey paint.

Yesterday, the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO) revealed that it was behind the optical illusion, which was created in collaboration with local artist Teng Kai Wei.

The installation was conjured up to usher in the Singapore Bicentennial, which marks the 200th an-

niversary of Raffles' landing in Singapore that is seen as a key turning point in the Republic's history.

Mr Teng covered half the statue with outdoor acrylic paint so that it blended in with OCBC Centre across the river, creating a trick-eye effect. A layer of liquid acting as a protective coating was first applied on the statue, to allow for the paint to be removed later.

As a cover story, the Singapore Tourism Board announced on Dec 7 that the statue would undergo maintenance works from Dec 10 to 28. "To facilitate the works, the statue will be hoarded up and will not be available for photo-taking," it said.

On-site work for the statue's new look began on Dec 10 and took about 2½ weeks to complete. It was unveiled on Dec 29.

Mr Teng, 32, said he hoped his work would make passers-by stop,

COOL EFFECT

My first thought was, 'Did they remove the statue and replace it with a hologram? It's actually quite cool.'

OFFICE WORKER YEO JING YING, who has been to see the statue twice.

pause and reflect, as well as evoke their curiosity to find out more about the Singapore Bicentennial.

He is a familiar face in the Singapore art scene who specialises in public sculptures.

Said an SBO spokesman: "As we enter the bicentennial year, we want

Singaporeans to think more deeply about our history – is our story just about one date or one man? The act of Raffles 'disappearing' is an opportunity to engage Singaporeans in an open dialogue about the many other men and women who also arrived on our shores and made significant contributions."

"Our history is a longer, 700-year story that dates back to 1299, and will be told over the bicentennial year, with many events planned, many of them by community groups with long histories."

A series of activities to mark the bicentennial will be officially launched on Jan 28 by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The SBO, which is under the Prime Minister's Office, oversees the coordination of the nationwide bicentennial commemoration.

Mr Clement Loh, 57, a driver,

dropped by the Raffles statue yesterday to take photos after reading about it in Chinese-language daily Lianhe Zaobao.

He told The Straits Times: "When they told me Raffles 'disappeared', I guessed that they used this painting effect to blend the statue into the surrounding buildings."

"This is quite novel, so I'm taking photos to show my family."

Office worker Yeo Jing Ying has been to see the statue twice, saying he was intrigued when he passed it on Dec 13 and it looked green.

The 34-year-old, who returned to the site yesterday, said: "My first thought was, 'Did they remove the statue and replace it with a hologram?' It's actually quite cool."

The artwork will be removed at the end of today.

liuxyv@sph.com.sg

Blade-wielding man arrested after stand-off with police

Timothy Goh

A 52-year-old man carrying a bladed weapon was arrested in Boon Lay Drive on Tuesday after a stand-off with the police.

The police said they responded to a call for assistance at Block 191 Boon Lay Drive at 5.18pm.

The man was arrested over possession of an offensive weapon and suspected drug-related offences.

A video of the incident circulat-

ing on social media shows the man facing off with at least three police officers. One of the officers is wielding a riot shield, while two are wearing helmets.

In the video, the man is wielding a long blade, which rests on his shoulder against his neck. The officers are heard telling him to put his weapon down, but he does not do so at first.

The officers then move in, restrain the man and disarm him while ordering him to get on the floor.

The Straits Times understands

that the officers had to physically restrain the man as he did not comply with orders to lay down his weapon. No injuries were reported in the incident.

An offensive weapon refers to any instrument which, if used as a weapon of offence, is likely to cause hurt.

While it is not an offence to own certain types of bladed weapons in Singapore if the owner has a permit for them and meets specific criteria, people are not allowed to carry

a sword in public without a lawful purpose.

Under the Corrosive and Explosive Substances and Offensive Weapons Act, any person who carries, has in possession or controls any offensive weapon in public without lawful authority or purpose can be jailed for up to three years and be given up to six strokes of the cane.

In 2014, a 39-year-old swordsmanship instructor who got on a bus and MRT train armed with a samurai sword was jailed for seven weeks.

He had poked the sword at a fellow passenger's stomach, leaving a mark, and swung it in a threatening manner when police warned him about his behaviour.

timgoh@sph.com.sg



A video of the incident shows a man carrying a long blade facing off with some police officers. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/ATIQAH SHAH

More trouble at dog facility over alleged car accident

Man said to have been hit by couple fleeing angry group seeking info on missing dog outside Platinium Dogs Club

Cara Wong

Accosted by a group of angry dog owners demanding information on a missing dog, a woman understood to be the owner of the Platinium Dogs Club and a male driver allegedly knocked into a man with their car while trying to get away from the crowd, said eyewitnesses.

The incident took place yesterday afternoon on the premises of pet boarding house Platinium Dogs Club in Bukit Panjang, and the 40-year-old man is understood to have suffered light injuries.

He was taken to hospital in an ambulance.

The pet boarding house is currently under investigation by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA), following complaints of mistreatment by dog owners who used its services.

Platinium Dogs Club advertises a variety of services on its website, including overnight board for dogs, daycare and grooming.

The group of 11 were led by a woman in her 30s who wanted to be known only as Ms Mao.

They were there to demand information on her missing dog, Prince.

According to Ms Mao, she had entrusted her 7½-year-old Shetland Sheepdog to Platinium Dogs Club since Dec 16 and had not received any news on it since last week.

Prince was not among the 18 dogs found at the house during a raid by AVA last Saturday, she said.

AVA took temporary custody of the animals and was contacting the owners in order to return their pets.

Ms Mao and her friends had stood outside the house's gates and were trying to ask the owner about Prince's whereabouts, she said.

"We were trying to get her to talk

to me. I was just asking her nicely to have a fair conversation, but she did not say a word," said Ms Mao.

"I said I was not going to question her on anything else, I just wanted information on Prince," she added.

But police officers arrived on the scene soon after and urged them to step away from the house's gates so the woman and her male companion could exit in their car, said Ms Mao.

Just as they were backing out, the car reversed suddenly and hit one of her friends, she said.

Others in the group said the man's kneecaps were injured when the car bumped into him.

The police said they were alerted to a case of people who had gathered outside a house and were obstructing the driveway of the compound at 4.35pm. Preliminary investigations showed that the 40-year-old man alleged he was hit by a vehicle when it was reversing out of the unit's compound, said the police.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force confirmed that it was alerted to a road traffic accident in the area at 4.52pm, and a person was taken to Ng Teng Fong General Hospital in a conscious state.

When The Straits Times reached the scene at about 6.30pm yesterday, the group of 10 were still waiting outside the boarding house while the woman and her male companion remained inside.

The pair left in their car at about 7pm, after the woman removed a missing-dog poster of Prince that was pasted on panels in front of the house gate.

Police said the 33-year-old driver, and the group of seven women and four men were assisting with investigations.

cara Wong@spph.com.sg



A woman who is understood to be Platinium Dogs Club's owner at the pet boarding house site yesterday (above) and a group of people outside the house holding up posters of missing dog Prince (left). ST PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO

LEAD INSPIRE SINGAPOREAN OF THE YEAR 2018

PRESENTED BY 

The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, organised in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of the human spirit



Teo You Yenn

Sociology researcher Teo You Yenn published a book of essays on the lives of people who live in HDB rental flats. This Is What Inequality Looks Like is a bestseller that has sparked a national conversation on socio-economic inequality in Singapore.

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

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NOTICES



About The Artist

Jan Camerone was born in Jakarta, Indonesia on 5th December 1948. Since his childhood, he has shown a love for drawing. He began his education in art as an apprentice of Mr. M.Toh, the palace painter in President Soekarno's era. From the outset, he has demonstrated his talent as a champion in several painting competitions at the Elementary School, Junior High School and Senior High School levels in Jakarta.

After finishing school, he decided to continue his studies in West Germany. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the Munich Academy of Fine Arts, Germany (Akademie der Bildenden Künste München), majoring in the painting styles of realism, impressionism, and surrealism. Following that, he

Reflection of Our Hearts by Jan Camerone

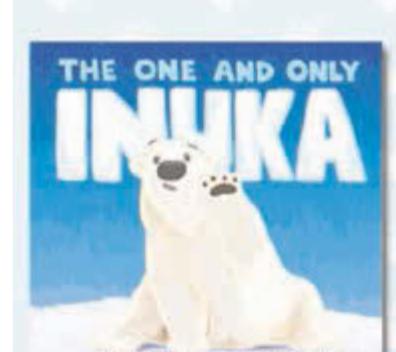
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embarked on a study tour around France and the Netherlands and also held a Sole Exhibition in Munich and Frankfurt, Germany.

After having lived abroad for almost a decade, he decided to return to his hometown, Jakarta. There, in the south of Jakarta, he established and ran an advertising agency, playing a key role as the art director. Eventually, after more than 20 years of staying creative outside his first love, he finally decided to retire and become a full-time artist.

Currently, when he is not at his workshop creating more wonderful paintings, Jan Camerone spends most of his time travelling and playing an active role in many major art exhibitions in Jakarta.



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900,000 HDB households to get utilities rebate this month

Depending on flat type, U-Save rebates this quarter range from \$60 to \$100

Ng Huiwen

About 900,000 Singaporean households living in Housing Board flats will receive vouchers to offset part of their utility bills this month.

The Ministry of Finance said yesterday that these households will receive a Utilities-Save (U-Save) rebate of up to \$100 this quarter, or up to \$390 annually, depending on the type of their HDB flat.

U-Save is one of the three components of the permanent goods and

services tax (GST) voucher scheme, which aims to help lower overall household expenses.

It is distributed every three months.

It was announced in Budget 2018 that eligible households will receive an additional \$20 a year (or \$5 per quarter) for three years, starting this year.

For the current quarter, households in one- or two-room flats will receive \$100, and those in three-room flats will get \$90, while families living in four-room flats will re-

ceive \$80, the ministry said.

Those living in five-room flats will receive \$70, and those in executive or multi-generation flats will get \$60.

Households whose members own more than one property are not eligible for this GST Voucher.

The ministry said in its statement that the scheme has enabled households in one- and two-room HDB flats to receive support equivalent to about three to four months of their utility bills, on average, in a year.

Those living in three- and four-room flats will be given support equivalent to one to two months of utility bills, it added.

The Government is expected to spend about \$300 million on the U-Save rebate this year.

The public can call SP Group on 6671-7117 or e-mail customersupport@spgroup.com.sg for more information on U-Save.

For details on the GST Voucher, go to www.gstvoucher.gov.sg

nghuiwen@sph.com.sg

GST Voucher – U-Save for Jan 2019

HDB flat type	Rebate to be given in Jan 2019 (\$)	Total annual rebate (\$)
One- and two-room	100	390
Three-room	90	350
Four-room	80	310
Five-room	70	270
Executive/multi-generation	60	230

NOTE: Households whose members own more than one property are not eligible for the GST Voucher – U-Save.

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF FINANCE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

SBS Transit bus hit by pipe in freak accident

An SBS Transit bus was involved in a freak accident in Woodlands Avenue 2 on Monday when a strong gust of wind blew a PVC pipe towards the bus, shattering one of its windows.

Passengers on bus service 161 said they were jolted by the loud "bang".

"Everyone was shocked. I wondered if the people on the lower deck were all right," said a 16-year-old student who wanted to be known only as Saiful.

He was seated on the upper deck of the bus when the accident happened at around 1.50pm.

Saiful told The Straits Times yesterday that it was raining when the bus passed a group of workers carrying pipes by the side of the road.

As the bus passed the workers,

one of the pipes moved towards it. Saiful said there was a loud "bang" as the pipe hit a left rear window on the lower deck. The impact left a hole in the window.

Saiful took photos of the incident and sent them to citizen journalism website Stomp.

After the bus driver stopped the bus, he went to the upper deck to check on passengers.

"Everybody then alighted to take a look at the bus," said Saiful.

Several of the construction workers boarded the bus and spoke with the bus driver later.

The passengers, including Saiful, then caught another bus to continue their journey.

Ms Tammy Tan, senior vice-president of corporate communications at SBS Transit, said that the bus was passing by a construction site at the time of the incident.

She said that the bus journey had to be disrupted as a result of the accident. "Fortunately, no one was hurt in this incident," she said.

Timothy Goh



SHOCKING INCIDENT

Everyone was shocked. I wondered if the people on the lower deck were all right.

“

STUDENT SAIFUL, who was on the upper deck of the double-decker bus when a pipe smashed into one of its windows.

Bus service 161 was hit by a PVC pipe in Woodlands Avenue 2 on Monday. The incident left a hole in the rear window on the lower deck of the bus. PHOTO: STOMP

One of the victims lying on the ground after the fight, which reportedly started after a shop owner told his tenant to vacate the premises because she was selling goods that were similar to his. PHOTO: SHIN MIN DAILY NEWS READER



HOCK LOCK SIEW
Sell Singapore residential, buy office? Not a foregone conclusion for all

Today in **THE BUSINESS TIMES**

A publication of **SPH**

Two taken to hospital after fight over use of shop space

Timothy Goh

Two people were taken to hospital after a fight in Ang Mo Kio on Tuesday over the use of business premises.

The police were alerted to the incident at Block 449 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 10, a little before 11am.

A 43-year-old man and a 47-year-old woman were taken conscious to Sengkang General Hospital.

The Straits Times understands that the fight was between a shop owner and a tenant.

Chinese-language evening paper *Shin Min Daily News* reported that about six months ago, a couple who run a dry goods store in the neighbourhood started renting out the space in front of their shop through a property agent.

At the time, the couple reportedly had an agreement with the agent that the space would not be rented to any vendor selling goods that were similar to theirs.

However, when the vendor opened for business in the space on

Tuesday, the couple found that she was selling the same kind of goods as them.

As they were afraid their business would be affected, the couple told the agent to ask her to vacate the area, which she did.

According to *Shin Min*, the new vendor's husband later returned to the shop with a few people, looking for the male owner of the dry goods shop to discuss the issue.

After a while, the talks escalated into a quarrel and a fight subsequently broke out.

The police are investigating the incident.

timgoh@sph.com.sg



British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said Singapore's education system, long-term investment in infrastructure and strategic approach to staying competitive in the world hold some lessons for Britain. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY JEREMY HUNT ON:

BREXIT AND... SEPARATION

Like Britain on 29th March this year, Singapore, too, faced an extraordinary challenge back on 9th August, 1965, when it separated from its larger neighbour. In Lee Kuan Yew's famous words: "Some countries are born independent. Some achieve independence. Singapore had independence thrust upon it."

Yet, his memoirs record how not everyone shared his anguish, least of all the investors who swiftly decided that "independence was good for the economy". By the second day, the value of almost all of Singapore's industrial stocks was climbing...

Today, Singapore has risen to become the eighth-richest country in the world per capita, surpassing Germany, France, Sweden and – though I whisper it softly – the United Kingdom.

As we leave the European Union, Britain can draw encouragement from how Singapore's separation from the peninsula did not make it more insular but more open. In Lee Kuan Yew's phrase, 1965 marked the moment when Singapore "plugged into the international economic grid".

“

LEARNING WHAT WORKS

What was right for Singapore won't always be right for Britain. We are committed to our social model, and as a former health secretary, I am particularly proud of our National Health Service with universal provision, free at the point of use, and in which my counterpart, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, worked with great dedication for two years.

But there is much we can learn from Singapore, not least the excellence of its education system, the long-term investment in infrastructure and a strategic approach to how a nation sustains competitive advantage in the world.

“

UK may draw strength from S'pore independence: Hunt

It did not make Republic more insular but more open, says British Foreign Secretary

Lim Min Zhang

As Britain prepares to leave the European Union in three months, its Foreign Secretary said it can draw encouragement from Singapore – on how gaining independence in 1965 did not make the Republic more insular, but more open.

A post-Brexit Britain hopes to deepen its ties with South-east Asia, through measures such as a strategic partnership with Singapore to be launched this week, and the opening of a new mission to Asean in the British Embassy in Jakarta later this year, said Mr Jeremy Hunt yesterday.

With the 200th anniversary of Sir Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar's landing in Singapore just over three weeks away, Mr Hunt said that the people of Singapore have built on the British legacy of the rule of law, clean administration, independent courts and the English language.

"The United Kingdom will always be ready to work alongside like-

minded countries, and few in Asia are more like-minded than Singapore," he said at the International Institute for Strategic Studies' 34th Fullerton Lecture at The Fullerton Hotel.

Mr Hunt, speaking ahead of his official visit to Singapore tomorrow – the first to Singapore by a UK Foreign Secretary since 2015 – said what was right for Singapore will not always be right for Britain.

"But there is much we can learn from Singapore, not least the excellence of its education system, the long-term investment in infrastructure and a strategic approach to how a nation sustains competitive advantage in the world," said Mr Hunt, who is visiting Malaysia today.

He noted that Singapore's real gross domestic product per capita has multiplied 15 times since its independence to reach US\$58,000 (S\$79,000), making it the eighth-richest country in the world by this measure, and surpassing even Britain.

Quoting founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, he said 1965 marked

the year when Singapore "plugged into the international economic grid".

Britain is set to leave the EU on March 29, following a referendum in 2016.

British lawmakers are due to debate the Brexit deal next Wednesday, before voting the following week.

In a speech on Britain's role in a post-Brexit world, Mr Hunt said the international order that has broadly existed since 1945 is under threat.

"What is wonkishly called the rules-based international system is under greater strain than for many decades, and the evidence is all around us," he said, citing examples such as Russia's annexation in Ukraine, the use of chemical weapons in Syria by the Assad regime and the expulsion of 700,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.

However, while Britain is not a superpower nor does it have an empire, it has its strengths – as the fifth-largest economy in the world, home to some of the world's top universities and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, he said.

"Most importantly, in a world where it is rarely possible for one

country to achieve its ambitions alone, the UK has some of the best connections of any country – whether through the Commonwealth, our alliance with the United States and our friendship with our neighbours in Europe."

He said he would be launching the new UK-Singapore Partnership for the Future with Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan tomorrow.

The partnership was agreed by the prime ministers of both countries last April at the Commonwealth Summit, with education, innovation, security and defence, culture and youth being some of the areas that will be covered.

Mr Hunt said Britain is the biggest European investor in South-east Asia, with Asean trade of nearly £37 billion (\$S63.7 billion), and over 4,000 British companies employing more than 50,000 people in Singapore.

"Those connections are why Britain's post-Brexit role should be to act as an invisible chain linking together the democracies of the world, those countries which share our values and support our belief in free trade, the rule of law and open societies," he added.

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Flea market held by Suntory staff raises \$5,230 for ChildAid concert

In three hours, staff of food and beverage company Suntory Beverage & Food Asia raised \$5,230 for an annual charity concert. It came from the sales made at a flea market they held last month. The money will go to this year's ChildAid, an annual charity concert organised by The Straits Times and The Business Times.

The concert raises funds for The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund (SPMF), which gives needy students money for recess and transport fees, as well as The Business Times Budding Artists Fund, which pays for arts training for disadvantaged children. At last year's concert, \$2,057,237 was raised.

Suntory Beverage & Food Asia, which has supported the SPMF since it was set up in 2000, donated \$100,000 last year. PHOTO: SUNTORY



ICA officer jailed 3 years for extensive abuse of power

He used work-issued phone to alert 3 women from China working illegally here to raids, texted them for massages

Shaffiq Alkhatib

An Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officer abused his position and used his work-issued phone to alert three Chinese nationals working illegally here to impending raids.

Chin Peng Sum, 51, also texted the women for massages, the court heard. His offences came to light when police arrested one of the women for vice-related activities on May 31, 2017, and his messages were found on her mobile phone.

Yesterday, District Judge Jasbendar Kaur said Chin had committed an "extensive abuse of power and trust", before sentencing him to three years in jail.

The ICA staff sergeant pleaded guilty last Friday to three offences under the Official Secrets Act and two counts of corruption. He also admitted to five counts of obstructing the course of justice.

Chin, who has been with the ICA since February 1998, has been suspended from service since June 15, 2017.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Loh Hui-Min told the court that Chin

first met the women some time between the end of 2016 and early 2017, while conducting operations to arrest immigration offenders.

The trio had been arrested for various immigration offences and were on Special Passes pending the conclusion of their cases.

Chin told them that he could have their Special Passes extended and claimed that this would let them remain in Singapore after their matters were concluded.

Some time in 2017, he contacted one of them for a massage, hoping to get a discount for her services. She agreed and they met in Geylang.

They had sex after the massage and Chin offered to pay her, but she rejected the payment.

The court heard that he contacted her for another session about a month later.

Chin made similar requests to another woman and received free services from her on two separate occasions.

The ICA was alerted after Chin's messages were later found on the mobile phone of one of the women.

After an interview with his management, he deleted the messages he had exchanged with the three

women. Court documents did not reveal the outcome of the trio's cases.

In a statement, the ICA said it takes a serious view of errant officers. Its spokesman added: "ICA officers are expected to discharge their duties professionally and maintain a high standard of integrity. Officers who break the law will be dealt with, in accordance with the law."

"Following the officer's conviction in court, we will commence civil service disciplinary proceedings against him, with a view to dismissing him from service."

For each count of corruption, Chin could have been jailed for up to five years and fined up to \$100,000.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS PENDING

Following the officer's conviction in court, we will commence civil service disciplinary proceedings against him, with a view to dismissing him from service.

“

AN IMMIGRATION AND CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY SPOKESMAN

Chin Peng Sum arriving at the State Courts with his wife yesterday. Chin, who has been with the ICA since February 1998, has been suspended from service since June 2017. ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW



Man charged with murder of woman in Geylang hotel

A man appeared in court to face a murder charge yesterday after a woman was found dead at the Golden Dragon Hotel in Geylang over the weekend.

Bangladeshi Ahmed Salim, 30, was charged with murdering Ms Nurhidayati Wartono Surata, 34, between 5.08pm and 8.12pm on Sunday. Police had said that the pair knew each other but court documents did not reveal the nature of their relationship.

The Straits Times earlier reported that officers were alerted to the case at 10.45pm on Sunday.

Ms Nurhidayati, an Indonesian, was later found lying motionless in a room at the hotel. Paramedics pronounced her dead at the scene and The Straits Times understands that she had marks on her neck as well as bruises on her arms.

Police arrested Ahmed within 14 hours after a report was made.

Chinese-language evening daily Lianhe Wanbao said an unnamed hotel employee said the pair had booked a room for three hours before extending the booking to five hours. But no one checked out 10 hours later. Lianhe Wanbao said hotel staff went upstairs to check the room and discovered the body.

A hotel guest, who declined to be named, told Wanbao that he did not hear any commotion and that he knew about the incident only when police knocked on his door.

Dressed in a red polo T-shirt, Ahmed was expressionless as he stood in the dock yesterday.

He is now remanded at the Central Police Division and the case has been adjourned till Jan 9.

If convicted of murder, he will face the death penalty.

Shaffiq Alkhatib

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Douglas Yeo and Poh Kok Wee

Veteran diver Douglas Yeo, 50, risked his life to help with the evacuation of the last five Thai boys who were trapped in a cave. Age also did not deter Poh Kok Wee, 57, from helping scout for alternative cave entrances to reach the boys.

FINALIST

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

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Jailed for assault, using criminal force on boys

Man grabbed boy, 5; tried to lure toddler outside shop; shook head of child, 7, in separate incidents

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A man targeted three young boys, including a toddler, in separate incidents last year, assaulting one of them and using criminal force

on the others.

Wang Kanglong admitted in court that he had inflicted pain on a five-year-old boy by grabbing his left shoulder. He also tried to carry a three-year-old toddler and shook a seven-year-old boy's head from side to side – although court documents did not reveal why he carried out the offences.

The 33-year-old was jailed for four weeks yesterday after pleading guilty to an assault charge and two counts of using criminal force.

He started his crime spree on July 11 last year when he went up to the five-year-old near his kindergarten in Pasir Ris and tried to snatch a toy away from the child's hands.

Wang also grabbed the boy's left shoulder, causing him pain.

A witness spotted him assaulting the child and confronted him. Wang then walked away and the police were notified.

He struck again about three months later when he approached a three-year-old boy sitting outside a Simei shop, where the toddler's mother worked.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Shenna Tjoa told District Judge May Meseena that Wang asked the child if he wanted to follow him for some ice cream. He also asked the toddler if he wanted to go to McDonald's fast food restaurant and Disneyland.

When a maid who worked for the child's family asked Wang to leave, he ignored her and tried to carry the child.

She took the boy away and the

toddler's father alerted the police about two hours later.

Wang also targeted a seven-year-old boy inside a Tampines Mall bookstore at around 9.15pm on Nov 22 last year.

DPP Tjoa said: "While the victim was playing with a display laptop... the accused approached the victim from behind and rubbed the victim's ears, using both his hands. He also shook the victim's head from side to side."

"The victim tried to shake off the accused but could not do so. The accused maintained contact... with the victim for a few seconds before letting go."

The court heard that the boy then ran towards his mother who was standing nearby and she called the police.

For assault, Wang could have been jailed for up to two years and fined up to \$5,000. And for each count of using criminal force, he could have been jailed for up to three months and fined up to \$1,500.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

Video shows lorry driver, motorcyclist in road rage incident

A video of a road rage incident involving a lorry and a motorcycle was circulated online yesterday, less than two weeks after a lorry driver and a cyclist were arrested following an altercation in Pasir Ris.

The latest incident took place along East Coast Road on Monday afternoon.

Footage of the incident, taken from the dashboard camera of a car that was passing by, was uploaded on Facebook site Roads.sg.

The video shows the stationary lorry on the side of the road with the driver's door open. A motorcyclist in a black T-shirt is seen approaching the driver's side and slamming the door shut.

A second motorcyclist, wearing a T-shirt with what appears to be a logo of food delivery company Deliveroo, approaches the lorry, apparently trying to calm the situation.



The video shows a motorcyclist in black kicking the lorry's side mirror, breaking it. The lorry then suddenly accelerates towards him, forcing him to run. PHOTOS: ROADS.SG/FACEBOOK

Both motorcycles can be seen in front of the lorry, one with a Foodpanda delivery bag attached to it.

The video then switches to footage from the car's rear camera, just in time to show the motorcyclist in black kicking the lorry's side mirror, breaking it.

However, both riders are forced to run immediately afterwards as the lorry suddenly accelerates towards them.

Though both of them escape, a screech can be heard as the lorry swerves in the direction of the first motorcyclist, who narrowly avoids being hit.

It then knocks over one of the motorcycles before coming to a halt.

There were no immediate responses from the police and the food delivery companies.

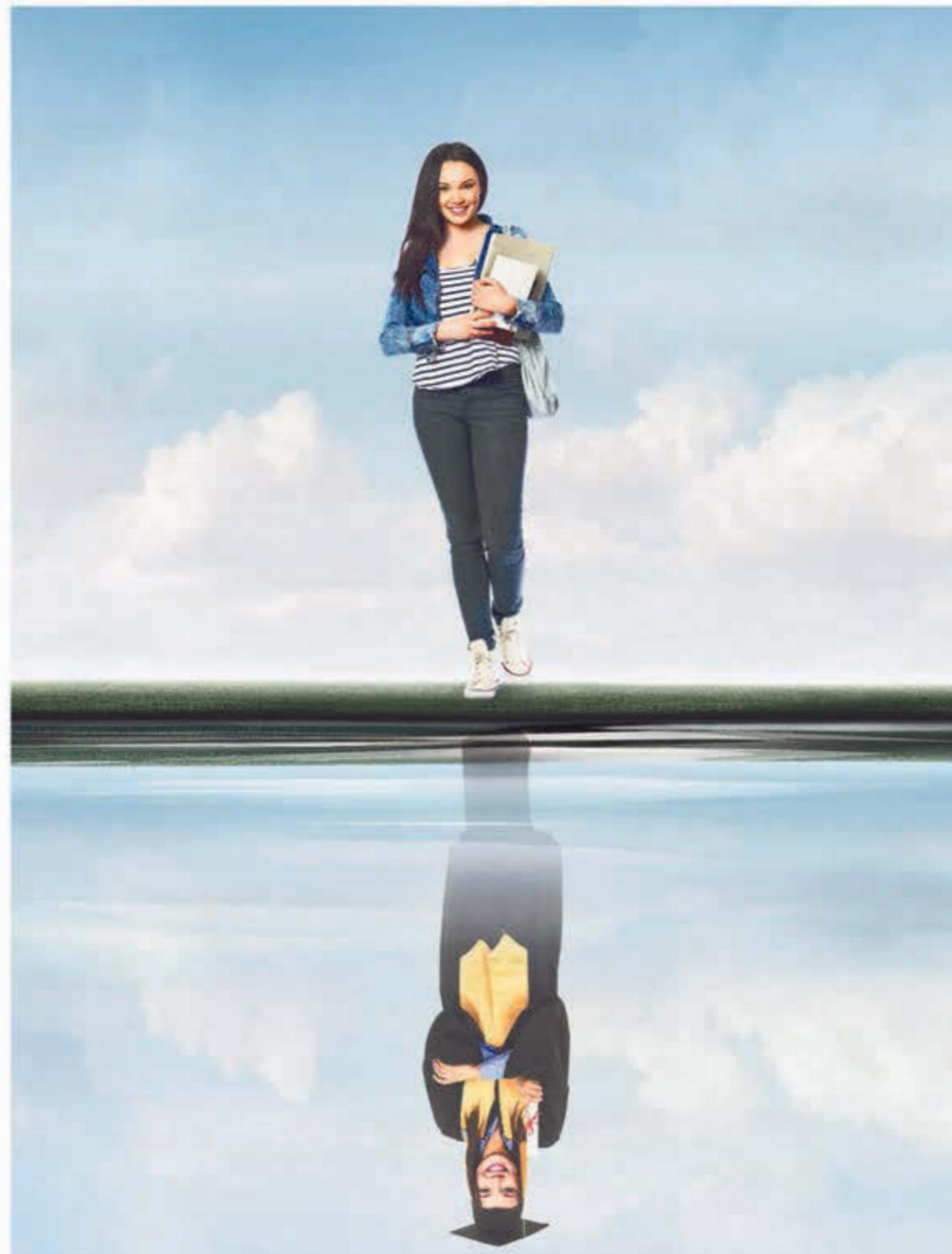
Timothy Goh

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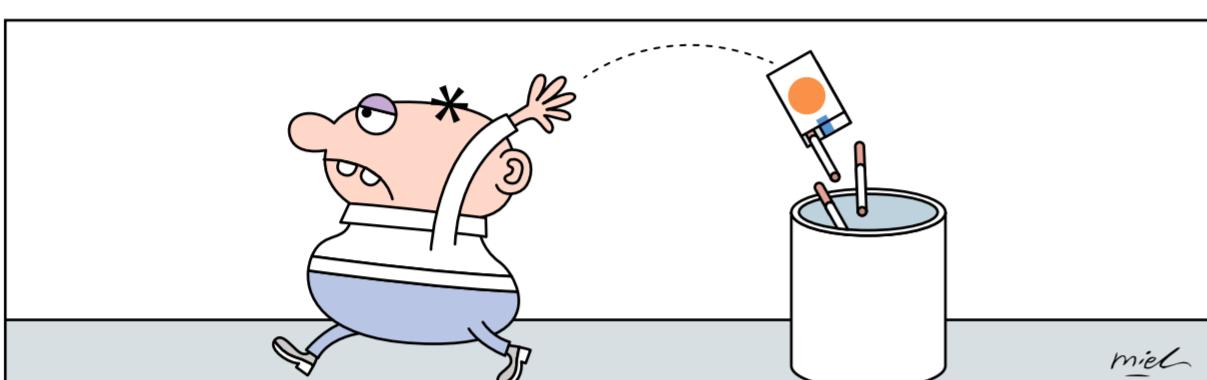
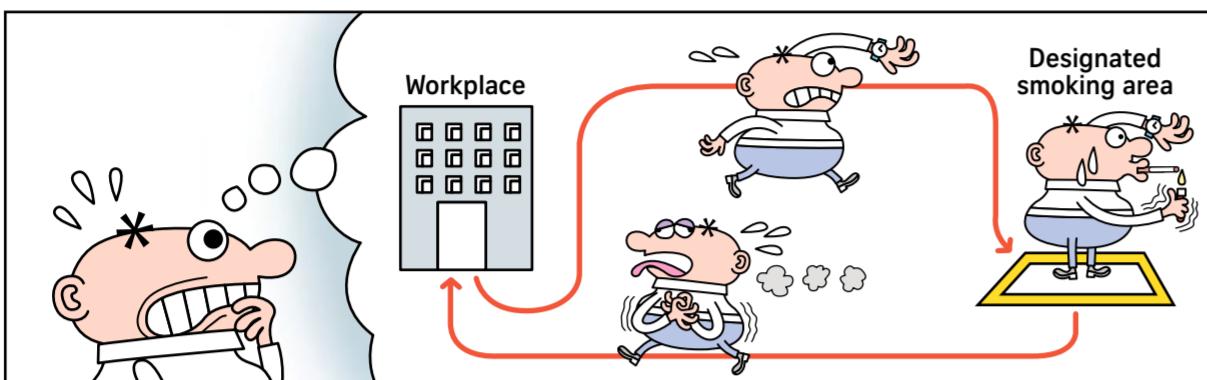
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FORUM

miel's TAKE

Smoking ban for Orchard Road kicks in



Why are some cyclists aggressive on the roads?

The jury is still out on the encounter between the cyclist and the lorry driver in Pasir Ris (Lorry driver, cyclist arrested after Pasir Ris road altercation; Dec 25, 2018).

Some have decided that the lorry driver was perhaps wrong to have rammed the biker, assuming that he did it on purpose, while others agree that anyone could have been distracted by the wing mirror being wrenched off his vehicle and, hence, the cyclist had it coming.

There are many videos online of

cyclists demonstrating loutish behaviour, including threatening police officers who were advising them to ride safely.

Two months ago, a video of a cyclist, who was stopped by the police for his inconsiderate riding, telling the officers that he knew his rights as a cyclist and intimidating them went viral.

Many of these cyclists sound like relatively high-level corporate executives who are drivers themselves, as one can see from the

proliferation of cars with bicycle-mounts installed on their rooftops. Why then do some of them behave aggressively towards other road users when they are on their bicycles?

It is time for the leaders of these cycling groups to remind their members of the rights and the wrongs of riding, as well as reinforce the need for them to be considerate to other road users when on the roads.

Chow Hon Meng

Improve after-school care centres

The relevant ministries should consider supporting young dual-income families with school-going children by setting up more after-school care centres.

While this is already in place for some schools, a proper system to ensure good care for the students has yet to be implemented.

Child development officers recruited at some of these centres are usually in-between jobs or under-qualified.

Safety rules are sometimes not in place, and the minimum number of students per class is often left up to the vendors who provide such services.

Here are some suggestions the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Social and Family

Development can consider.

- Provide a subsidy for each child sent to an after-school care centre, provided they do not have a domestic helper at home and both parents are working.
- Second trained primary school teachers to these after-school care centres.
- There are many advantages for trained teachers to take up this role. There is no lesson preparation needed and the work hours are almost fixed. This can solve the problem of the oversupply of teachers due to the falling birth rate.
- Monitor after-school care centres by clusters to ensure that the standard operating procedures are strictly adhered to.

- Support after-school care centres in building up their niche areas and equip them with dance studios or pottery studios, for example, or allow the use of school fields for coaches to train students.

With an increase in the ministries' support, after-school care centres can do much more than just babysitting and making sure the homework is done.

In developing our after-school care centres, we could potentially rely less on foreign domestic helpers, free up more weekend time for bonding between parents and children and reduce the number of latchkey children.

Joyce Anne Chia (Madam)

Spread top students among more schools

While it is praiseworthy that the Ministry of Education (MOE) has made it more affordable for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to study in independent schools to tackle inequality, a better move would have been to spread our top students across more schools (Independent schools to be made more affordable for less well-off; Dec 28, 2018).

Before the 1980s, there were bright students in more schools. While top schools like Raffles Institution had the lion's share of bright students, it was also common for students from other schools to finish among the top in Singapore.

The inequality gap was not as evident as most schools had their share of students from the various strata of society.

The issue of inequality today should not just be about the inequality in wealth but should also be about the inequality in talent.

The Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme, which was introduced to make it possible for students who excel in non-academic areas to study at top schools, is in fact depriving the non-elite schools of talented students.

Take the annual National School Games, for example. The winners of the competitions are usually from the few top

schools. Sometimes, even the Singapore Sports School loses out to the top schools in attracting sporting talent.

How can every school be a good school when non-elite schools "train the best but keep the rest"? Alas, the latest move by the MOE will likely exaggerate this divide.

Instead, we should be spreading top students among more schools in order to teach such students to empathise with the less wealthy and be more compassionate.

The DSA scheme should also be discontinued so that non-elite schools have a fair chance at procuring sporting or art talents.

Gerard Lee How Cheng

NewsEd

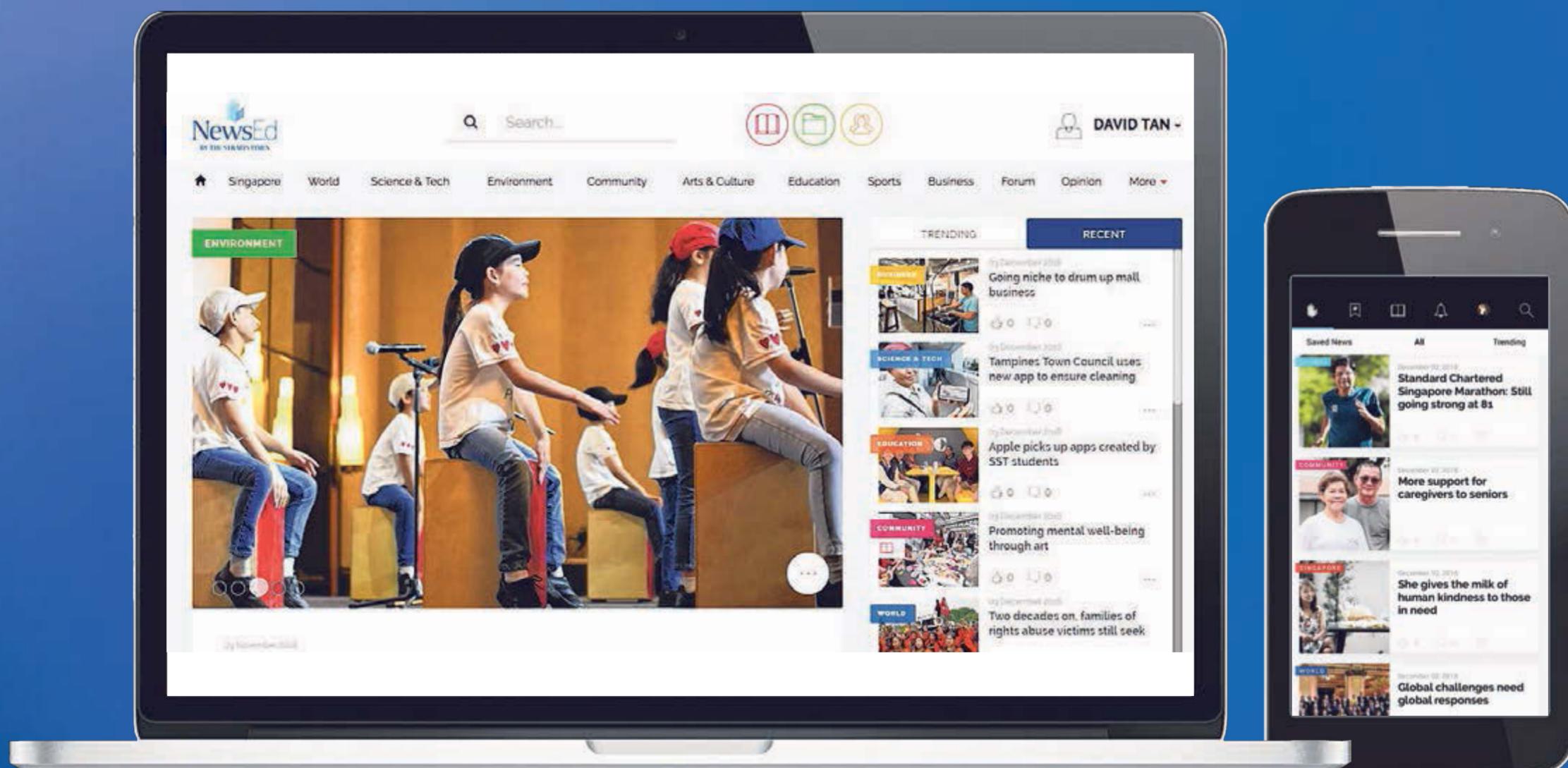
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Resolve bilateral issues without politicising them

I wholeheartedly support Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's statement in his New Year message that Singapore will deal with all outstanding bilateral matters "calmly and constructively" (Eventful year for S'pore abroad and at home; Jan 1).

Singapore and Malaysia enjoy and share a special relationship due to our historical and cultural links as well as our geographical proximity, which has resulted in both opportunities and challenges.

I believe both countries are acutely aware of the mutual importance of each other, and must continually look for ways and means to improve relations at all levels.

Equally important are the realisation and acceptance that even with many of the contentious bilateral issues outstanding, it is imperative that both sides look at the big picture and work together

for mutual benefit in a region and a world that is fast-changing.

The two countries are smaller players on the world stage but have the capacity and the wherewithal to contribute meaningfully to regional security and well-being. This is a pragmatic way forward.

In the past, the leadership in Malaysia and Singapore have shown the light of cooperation and mutual understanding between them in accordance to the principles of "prosper thy neighbour" via economic, security and social aspects in order to realise the potential of each country.

The "win-win" situation is the best way to settle our bilateral problems. It can be achieved only if both parties are willing to accept the fact that the key to solving the outstanding bilateral issues is their willingness to compromise.

This will eventually lead to

better relations.

The understanding reached by the leaders of the two countries must be based on the idea of preserving long-term mutual benefits.

This can be achieved by stepping up efforts to encourage more interaction between the various sectors and levels of the two countries.

Emphasis should also be given to youth and student exchanges as these will lay a strong foundation for better bilateral relations between the two countries.

In the past, it has been shown that given goodwill and tolerance, the two countries and their people can cooperate and coexist.

I believe if both nations avoid politicising the outstanding issues and resolve these away from media glare, a solution satisfactory to both countries can be reached.

Sattar Bawany (Professor)

How will new smoking age rule be enforced in army camps?

The move to increase the minimum smoking age to 19 this year and progressively to 21 every January until 2021 is a good one (Minimum legal age for smoking goes up to 19 from Jan 1; Dec 31, 2018).

However, we must take note that the age for national service enlistment is 18, and there are boys who would have started smoking before their enlistment.

I am wondering how this new ruling is going to be implemented in the camps.

Are the number of existing yellow boxes in camps going to be reduced? Who will be enforcing the new ruling for underage smokers when they are inside the camps?

If this is properly addressed and handled, Singapore will have fewer smokers in the future.

Sia Chuan Han

Singapore should also limit pet sales to rescue animals

From this year, pet shops in California will be allowed to sell only dogs, cats, and rabbits that have been rescued by animal welfare groups or the animal control authorities.

As an animal welfare group, Bunny Wonderland hopes that the Singapore Government will introduce similar measures.

Such a move will reduce the overall supply of domesticated animals, which will in turn reduce the number of them which are neglected and need assistance from the overworked animal welfare groups.

This will also help animal welfare groups place rescued animals into good homes much faster as we can tap the extensive network of pet shops to reach a much larger audience than we currently have.

This will take more unwanted animals off the streets and free up time for animal control officers to focus on higher-value areas of their work, such as investigating abuse cases instead of catching strays.

Keeping captured strays in the pound – and even euthanising them – also incurs costs, so money will be saved by having fewer of them around.

Despite the ethical and pragmatic advantages of the move, some may resist the idea as they

may think that rescued animals are damaged goods and come with plenty of health problems.

Ironically, however, many of these problems arise from malpractice by breeders.

For example, more than half of all rabbits here have latent *encephalitozoon cuniculi* fungal spores in their bodies due to unsanitary conditions at pet farms.

The battery-like housing arrangements at such farms also allow such infections to spread very easily.

Furthermore, baby animals are often weaned prematurely and this can cause various ailments, such as poor immunity, that may show up only later in life.

Potential adopters who approach animal welfare groups like Bunny Wonderland have the benefit of knowing the exact medical issues they are taking responsibility for because we send our rescued animals for screening and communicate the results openly to the public.

On the other hand, buying a brand-new pet from a breeder could open a Pandora's box, as there is no way of knowing what problems the animal has until it is too late.

Jonathan Tiong Soon Yi
Volunteer (Outreach)
Bunny Wonderland Singapore

Celebrate William Farquhar's contributions too

This year, we mark our country's bicentenary (Bicentennial showcase by creative NDP veterans; Dec 9, 2018).

While Sir Stamford Raffles has mostly been credited for the establishment of the trading post in Singapore, let's not forget the very important role Major-General

William Farquhar played.

Without Maj-Gen Farquhar, there may not be a Singapore as we know it today. He negotiated and drafted the treaty that was signed by the Sultan of Johor and Sir Raffles.

Sir Raffles left Singapore soon after the trading post was established and appointed Maj-Gen

Farquhar as first British Resident and Commandant of Singapore.

Before this appointment, Maj-Gen Farquhar was the Resident of Malacca and was highly regarded by the European traders and community as well as the regional and Chinese traders during his time there.

Because of this, the European traders and others followed him to Singapore, rapidly making this island the centre of trade in this area.

In celebrating Singapore's bicentennial, we must also highlight the very important role played by Maj-Gen Farquhar.

Timothy Lim Seong Thiam

WRITE IN: Letters should be meant for exclusive publication in The Straits Times. They should be no longer than 400 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone numbers. The Forum editor reserves the right to edit the letters. For women, please indicate Miss, Ms, Mrs or Madam. Please e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg. Readers can also respond to letters via Facebook and Twitter.

Adopt 'shock therapy' to tackle plastic problem

Like Ms Natasha Bipin Doshi, I am concerned that the Government is not doing enough to tackle the indiscriminate use of plastic bags (Saving Earth goes beyond straw bans; Dec 24, 2018).

It appears to be relying on public education, which is still proving to be ineffective after all these years.

However, I disagree with her view that imposing a levy might not be effective.

I just returned from Hong Kong, where I observed that the people appear to be more receptive to using reusable bags for their purchases.

One reason for this might be the levy that many shops impose on

plastic bags.

For some reason, my parents preferred using the plastic bags provided to contain some of their purchases, even though they had reusable bags with them.

However, upon learning that there was a plastic bag levy, they switched to reusable bags instead, citing the levy which, to

them, superseded their other reasons. So, I do believe that levies can change behaviour.

Of course, a levy should not be the only measure. A reward can also go a long way in encouraging shoppers to go green.

If a levy still proves ineffective, then the Government should consider a plastic bag ban.

It is definitely not impossible, given that many cities have done so.

One example is Bali, which is implementing a ban (Bali bans single-use plastics in bid to cut rubbish in sea; Dec 27, 2018).

Many are also worried that a plastic bag ban might pose a problem for our trash collection, as many of us are accustomed to bagging our rubbish before disposal.

This will not be a cause for concern if we use paid-for rubbish bags instead.

Moreover, if rubbish bags have to be purchased, I believe Singaporeans will learn to maximise the use of those bags by reducing and recycling their trash, instead of disposing of things indiscriminately.

Given the urgency of climate and environment problems, the Government must have the courage to adopt "shock therapy" if small steps have proven futile.

Sean Lim Wei Xin

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The Facebook group was set up to promote positive journalism by encouraging users to share news of meaningful deeds.

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The project, told through words, photos and videos, documents the last days of a cancer patient and the volunteers who accompanied him to the end.

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The interactive game was part of ST's coverage of the Budget this year. It invites users to pick a character and navigate their financial decisions.

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The magazine and newsletter provide readers highlights of ST correspondents' reportage across the region. There is also dedicated Facebook page.

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The initiative launched in February this year focuses on producing exclusive stories, first-hand reporting and opinion pieces for subscribers.

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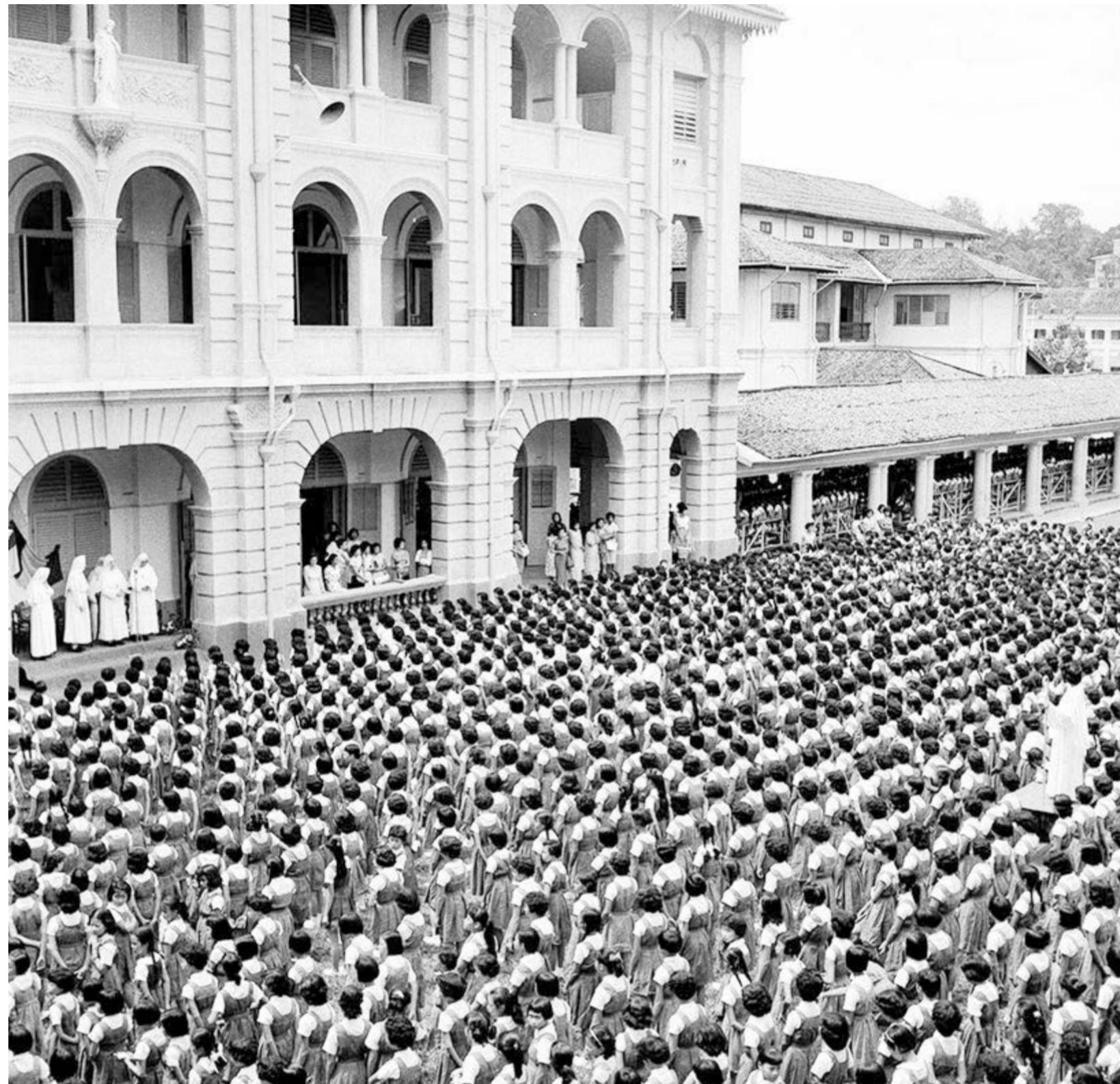
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ST PHOTO: ALI YUSOFF

A big welcome at school

Nearly 4,000 schoolgirls from the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus and St Nicholas Convent welcoming the world head of their institution, Reverend Mother St John, from Paris on Jan 10, 1961, at their premises in Victoria Street.

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